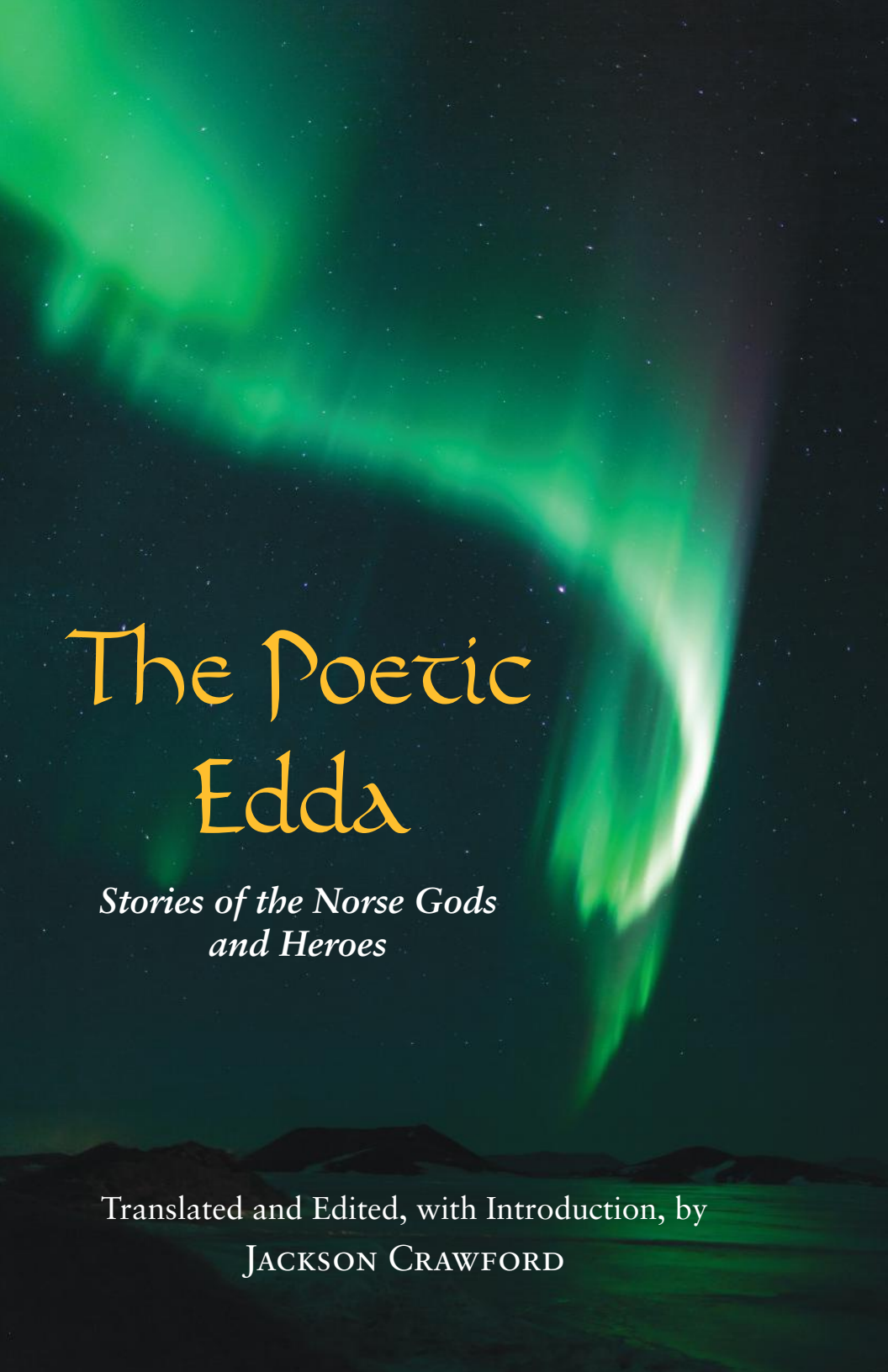
The Poetic Edda
Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes
Translated and Edited, with Introduction, by
Jackson Crawford

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To two fire-hearted heroes, gone far away,
whose spirits breathe life in me still:
To Papa, my biggest inspiration,
and Wyatt, my smallest.

Og til deg, du nøkkel, lås og dør,
mitt hjartas stad—
mi grue, kveike, ved og glør,
eg gjev mitt kvad.

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The mistakes and infelicities in this book are, naturally, attributable to me alone.

Jackson Crawford
Riverton, Wyoming
December 29, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

In a Nutshell

The Poetic Edda is a collection of poems in the Old Norse language. These poems are the source of almost all the myths of the Norse gods—famous characters in popular culture such as Odin, Thor, and Loki—and also of the thrilling and tragic adventures of legendary Viking heroes, especially Sigurth, his wife Guthrun, and her brothers Gunnar and Hogni.

The World of the Poetic Edda

The poems of the Poetic Edda have their roots in the cold, brutal world of medieval Scandinavia. During the so-called Viking Age (roughly AD 800–1100), the fierce Scandinavian pirates and adventurers known as Vikings robbed and raided in nearly every country of Europe, and explored as far afield as Baghdad and the eastern coast of present-day Canada. Meanwhile, they developed an extensive poetic literature about their gods and heroes, which their Christian descendants would commit to writing many centuries later.

Readers must understand a few facts about the culture that produced these poems, since the characters in them often act in a way that is incompatible with twenty-first-century social norms. Norse society prized a warlike, aggressive stance in men, and in the gods they worshipped. Fighting over limited resources, and even naked aggression against neighbors, was not necessarily considered wrong if it advanced one's wealth and honor and that of one's family. With the availability of natural resources sharply limited in medieval Scandinavia by its harsh climate and (in many regions) by sparse farmland, violent competition between families was a fact of life, and the raiding of overseas territories blessed with more food and gold must have seemed no more ethically problematic than the killing of an animal for its flesh and hide.

Not that Norse society recognized no code of ethics. But unlike modern moral standards, which tend to be utilitarian and altruistic (Does a given action benefit someone without harming someone else?), the Norse moral code was based on gaining and maintaining

honor, and avoiding shame. Honor was gained principally through displays of one's courage in confrontations with enemies, initiative and hard work at the farm and aboard ship, and a readiness to use violence in return for the violence done to one's friends and relatives. Those who show these qualities most abundantly, such as the god Thor and the hero Sigurth, are praised, in spite of actions that modern society would consider crude or evil (Thor owns slaves, for instance, and in the poem *Harbarthsljoth* he tells his father Odin that he would have gladly helped him hold down a woman he was trying to have his way with).

In a society in which the main social unit was not the individual but the family, it was imperative for members of the family to maintain their honor by avenging any harm done to another member of their family. If a man's brother had been killed, he would have to take revenge on the killer, but he might exact vengeance by killing a member of the killer's family rather than by killing the perpetrator directly. This promise of mutual revenge bound a family together in a feuding world, and thus there was a special horror for the notion of accidentally or knowingly doing damage to one's own family.

Nonetheless, the heroes of the Poetic Edda are sometimes forced to take action against their own families, usually because of the ironclad force of their sworn words and boasts. The Eddic poems depict a world in which a person's words are absolutely binding, no matter the consequences—which are often tragic. For instance, in *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*, Hethin boasts (while drunk) that he will take his brother Helgi's lover, the Valkyrie named Svava. Though Hethin regrets this foolish and dangerous oath almost immediately, Helgi casually accepts that it is his brother's duty to carry it through:

33 "Don't concern yourself,
Hethin; the oaths
men make while drinking
will always prove true.
A king has challenged me
to a duel, and before three nights
have passed, I must meet him
at the appointed place.
I doubt that I
will survive;
and then it would be good,
if you took Svava."

But of course, the problems created by such oaths are not always resolved so conveniently. The greatest tragedy of the heroic poems is the murder of Sigurth, which is brought about because Brynhild has been tricked into breaking her vow that she will marry only a man who knows no fear (she marries Gunnar, believing him to be the fearless man who braved her test of courage, but in fact it was Sigurth in disguise). Since not Brynhild but her sister-in-law Guthrun married the fearless Sigurth, Brynhild insists that her husband Gunnar must kill him. But even here, Gunnar and his brother Hogni will not break their oaths of blood-brotherhood with Sigurth, and Gunnar instead must get his brother Gotthorm, who was too young to swear oaths with Sigurth, to commit the murder.

One gets a sense from scenes like this that faithfully keeping promises ought to be the glue that holds society together, but instead tears it apart. It is instructive to remember that the evil god Loki, whose actions cause the gods constant heartbreak and loss, is tolerated in the gods' homes because of Odin's oath that he will never drink unless Loki is served too (see *Lokasenna*, st. 9–10).

Norse society also had a fairly rigid class structure, one reflected in nearly every poem in the Poetic Edda. It is most obvious in *Rigsthula*, which tells the story of how the god Heimdall fathered the ancestors of the three human classes (slaves and peasants, free men, and the nobility), and which makes clear the different standards of dress, activity, and diet that were expected of people at different social levels. But the rigidity of the class structure is also reflected in an abundance of offhand comments; in fact, the very first lines of the first poem, *Voluspa*, casually assert the existence of higher- and lower-born people: "Heed my words, / all classes of men, / you greater and lesser / children of Heimdall." Just as casual is Oddrun's reminder in *Oddrunargratr* that she made an oath to provide her medical expertise not just to anyone, but to anyone of sufficiently high class:

10 Oddrun said,
"I did not come here
because I thought
you were worth my help.
I have sworn that I
will always give help
when it is needed
to those who share
my noble rank,
and I honor my oath."

Another component of Norse society that surfaces in many poems is the belief that each person has an inevitable, fixed date of death, decided by the shadowy goddesses of fate called the *Norns*. This is what the hero Sigurth alludes to, for instance, when he shrugs off the dragon's threats in *Fafnismal*:

10 "Every man will
manage his own wealth
till his fated death-day,
but there is a time
when each one of us
leaves here for Hel."

Or, to quote Sorli in *Hamthismal*:

30 "But we fought well,
we stand over sword-torn
Gothic corpses and
set a table for the eagles.
We earned honor here,
though we are fated to die today—
a man will not live one day longer
than the Norns have decided."

But beyond even this belief in an inevitable death-date, many of the poems of the Poetic Edda convey a sense that every detail of a life and death can be foreseen, and that this inevitable course of events cannot be changed. The witch in *Voluspa* foresees the death of all the gods, and offers no way for it to be avoided. On a more individual level, Sigurth's entire life is foretold to him in *Gripis-spa*—including most of the terrible mistakes he will soon make—but this does nothing to prevent him from doing exactly what he was predicted to do. The characters in these myths are marching toward their doom, unable to change course or to step off their predetermined path even if they fight it the entire way. Only the god Odin seems to believe seriously that he can reverse fate, but the reward for his efforts will be a final defeat just as total as if he had never tried.

Thus, a profound sense of hopelessness pervades the myths of the Poetic Edda. The gods know that they will inevitably die in the fiery final battle of *Ragnarok*, and not a single one of the main human characters in the heroic poems dies happy. But surprisingly, the despair of a bad end is not accompanied by a sense of hopeless despair in any of the poems—instead, the gods and heroes alike

are actively engaged in courageously combating the inevitable. This code of boldness and the defiance of fate must have stirred something in the Norse audience in their barren farmsteads and blood-stained seaside camps, just as it may stir a modern audience faced with the seemingly hopeless circumstances of life in the crowded, postindustrial world of today.

The Gods, the Realms, and the Heroes: A Basic Orientation

Leading the gods is *Odin*, often called the "Allfather." Odin is a profoundly anxious and, in some senses, selfish character, which is rarely suggested by his depictions in popular media. Odin knows (thanks to the prophecy in the poem *Voluspa*) that his fate and the fate of all the gods with him is to die at Ragnarok, and so he desperately gathers wisdom and knowledge in an effort to learn some way to postpone this catastrophe. In particular, he has sacrificed his own eye in the well of Mimir for a drink of its wisdom-granting waters (*Voluspa*, st. 28), and he has even sacrificed himself to himself on the supernatural ash tree *Yggdrasil* in order to learn the runes (see *Havamal*, st. 138–41).

In order to raise an army to fight by his side at Ragnarok, Odin travels in *Midgard* (the realm of humans) in disguise, stirring up battles and often granting favors to powerful warriors. He sends his Valkyries (human women with the power of flight) to bring the men who die in battle to his hall, *Valhalla* (literally "the hall of men killed in battle"), in *Asgard* (the realm of the gods). In Valhalla, these men fight and kill one another all day, and in the evening they are resurrected for a feast. Because death in battle was the only way to join Odin's heroes in Valhalla, the religion of the Viking Age reinforced and encouraged the reckless disregard for life that is a hallmark of so many of the heroes of the Poetic Edda and the Norse sagas. But by the same token, Odin's role as an inciter of war and a killer of men led to some unease about his role, as we see in some of the insults Thor and Loki level at him in the poems *Harbarthsljoth* and *Lokasenna*, respectively, and by many of his own names that Odin lists at the end of *Grimnismal* (such as "Evil doer," "Battle-Merry," and even simply "Killer").

Regarded as a family, Odin and his children are referred to as the *Aesir*. Odin's wife is *Frigg*, and with her Odin has two sons, *Balder* and *Hoth*. The accidental murder of Balder by his blind

brother Hoth is one of the great tragedies of Norse mythology, and it is instigated by *Loki*, a fickle, enigmatic figure who sometimes aids and sometimes harms the gods. Loki's children include the wolf *Fenrir*, who bit off the hand of the god *Tyr* and who will eventually kill Odin, as well as *Hel*, the half-corpse queen of the dead, and the *Midgard-serpent*, a dragon who encircles Midgard and who will eventually kill, and be killed by, *Thor*.

The god Thor is the son of the Earth (personified as a goddess) and Odin, and by far the most popular of the Norse gods. Where Odin is unpredictable, snobbish, and even treacherous, Thor is a hero of the common man, usually hard at work killing giants with his hammer, *Mjollnir*. In the pages of the Poetic Edda, his popularity can be seen both in the ways he is depicted respectfully and seriously (as at the end of *Lokasenna*, when it is only Thor's threats that scare Loki) and with tongue in cheek (as in the humiliation he suffers when he has to dress like a bride in *Thrymskvitha*).

In addition to the Aesir gods, there are also the *Vanir*, who are lower in rank than the Aesir and associated with nature and fertility. The Vanir include *Njorth*, god of the sea, and his two children, *Frey*, god of agriculture, and *Freyja*, goddess of love. There are hints that there are (or were) more Vanir, but that the Aesir defeated them in an ancient war, and that Njorth and his children are the hostages from that conflict.

The home of the gods in Asgard can be reached from Midgard by means of the rainbow bridge, *Bifrost*. This bridge is guarded by *Heimdall*, watchman of the gods, who has magnificent powers of vision and hearing, and who is also referred to as the father of human beings (for that story, see the poem *Rigsthula*). To the east of Asgard, beyond a vast sea that encircles Midgard, is *Jotunheim*, the realm of the gods' enemies, the *giants* (note that the giants are not necessarily larger than the gods, and do not necessarily look different from gods or humans). There are other realms (such as *Hel*, the home of the dead who do not die in battle), but most of the action of the Eddic poems takes place on Midgard, Asgard, and Jotunheim. These realms are connected by the roots of the great ash tree Yggdrasil.

Readers may be tempted to see the poems about the heroes as more separate from the poems about the gods than they are, but they are products of very much the same society and period, and the human heroes are connected to the gods both by genealogy (as the poem *Voluspa en skamma* shows) and by Odin's profound interest in helping and harvesting human warriors (for instance,

in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*, where Odin assists Dag very directly in his mission of vengeance).

The human characters of the heroic poems are members or relations of the family of the *Volsungs*, including most notably *Sigmund* and his sons *Helgi* and *Sigurth*. Helgi's story is an interesting study in the variations and changes that can add up in a myth as it is told in different ways in different places and times, as the three poems about him follow the same basic skeletal pattern (a warrior-prince named Helgi falls in love with a Valkyrie) but with substantial differences, including who Helgi's father is (Hjorvarth or Sigmund). The poems about Sigurth tell a more straightforward narrative, of a brave prince who kills a dragon but is killed when Brynhild, the jealous wife of his brother-in-law Gunnar, manipulates her husband and his brothers into betraying him. Following his death, the last poems of the Poetic Edda focus on Sigurth's widow, Guthrun, who is remarried to Attila, and who kills her second husband after he kills her brothers.

Motifs and Style

The poetry of the Poetic Edda makes use of certain stock phrases and images, many of which are rooted in the realities of medieval life and warfare.

Three species of scavenging predatory animals—eagles, ravens, and wolves—are frequently mentioned, alone or together. One particularly frequent motif is the "feeding of" (or as I have sometimes rendered it, "setting a table for") these animals, a visceral shorthand for killing in battle. One of the most striking statements of this theme is from the poem *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*:

5 . . .
One raven said
to another raven,
expecting a feast:
"I know something:

6 "Sigmund's young son
will wear armor!
He's just a day old;
his first day has just dawned.
But he has sharp eyes

like a war-king;
that boy's a friend of wolves—
we'll be happy and well-fed!"

Not only is being followed by scavenging predators predictive of success in battle (see, for instance, *Reginsmal*, st. 20 and 22), but as opportunistic feeders on the weak and dead, these creatures function also as a mirror in which the Norse raider sees himself and his warlike gods. Indeed the war-god Odin's mental powers are literally embodied in his ravens *Thought* and *Memory*, as he implies in a stanza from *Grimnismal*, which for all its mythic color reads like the poignant reflection of an elderly man worried about what he might forget in his old age:

20 "Thought and Memory,
my ravens, fly every day
the whole world over.
Each day I fear
that Thought might not return,
but I fear more for Memory."

Another major theme is *wisdom*, though this has a narrower meaning for us than it had for the Norse, who used "wisdom" to mean many sorts of mental abilities, including a deep knowledge of obscure facts and often some kind of power to foresee the future. So while Odin in the poem *Havamal* speaks of wisdom mostly in the modern sense of intelligent behavior and understanding, in the next poem, *Vafthruthnismal*, he has a contest to see whether he or the giant Riddle-Weaver is "wiser"—meaning whether he or the giant knows more facts and names about mythical creatures and places (similar definitions of what it means to be "wise" are seen in *Grimnismal* and *Alvissmal*, among other poems). Meanwhile, in *Gripisspa*, the hero Sigurth's uncle Gripir is said to be wise because he can foresee the future. Of course, those who have this kind of wisdom are also those who are most acutely aware of the doom that awaits them, and this may be a curse, as Odin explicitly says in *Havamal*:

55 You should be
only a little wise,
never too wise.
A wise man's heart
is seldom glad
if he's truly wise.

56 You should be
only a little wise,
never too wise.
It's best not to know
your fate beforehand;
you'll live happier if you don't.

Additionally, the Eddic poems are often rambling and discursive in a way that modern readers may not be used to, especially when it comes to dispensing "wisdom" of the kind briefly discussed above. Time and time again, the thread of a story will be momentarily broken while a character asks for or imparts some wisdom or lore. This is especially true of the poems about young Sigurth—see the exchange of Loki and Andvari in *Reginsmal* (st. 3–4) for a short example, or most of the poem *Fafnismal* for a very long example. Consider how abruptly Sigurth interrupts Fafnir—a dragon who is dying from a wound Sigurth gave him!—to ask him:

12 "Tell me, Fafnir,
they say you are wise,
and very knowledgeable—
who are the Norns
who govern childbirth
and choose who mothers what child?"

Another technique that may seem odd to modern readers is that many of the mythical stories in the Poetic Edda switch back and forth between prose ("plain" writing) and poetry. Many of the poems are preceded by a prose introduction that sets the stage for the action and dialogue in the poem—*Grimnismal* and *Lokasenna*, for example. Others have the dialogue mostly in verse but the narration mostly in prose (*Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* is an example), or they conclude with a brief epilogue in prose (as *Lokasenna* or *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* do), or simply with a note that the reader has reached the end of the poem, or a reminder of what the name of the poem is (as in *Hamthismal*).

As for the characteristics of the poetry itself, the verses of the Poetic Edda do not rhyme or use a consistent number of syllables, as traditional English poetry does. Instead, the poetry is held together by alliteration and by counting the number of stressed syllables in a line.

The meter used in most of the poems of the Poetic Edda is known appropriately as *fornyrthislag*, or "meter for ancient

sayings." Each stanza consists of (usually) six to ten lines, with each odd line paired with the following even line. Each line will have two stressed syllables, one of which will alliterate with a stressed syllable in its paired line (the odd line may also have alliteration in both stressed syllables); usually the even line will begin with the alliterating syllable.

The meter is not difficult to use in English, and something of its style may be gleaned from a single modern *fornyrthislag* stanza in English (an *x* above a syllable marks it as stressed, and a bold letter indicates alliteration with a syllable in the paired line):

x x
1 Hummingbirds
x x
2 battle fiercely,
x x
3 make war,
x x
4 mighty fliers.
x x
5 Feather-covered
x x
6 fighters have no
x x
7 dread, save of
x x
8 dying in peace.

In my translation, I have not sought to reproduce the meter of the original poems, nor have I made any particular effort to regularize the length of lines in the poems if doing so would add to, or subtract from, the original meaning of a stanza. Old Norse is a highly inflected language, and often a much more compact medium of expression than English. In particular, Old Norse poetry frequently employs ad-hoc compound words known as *kennings* that are deliberate riddles to be deciphered. Kennings are typically compact analogies, such as "whale-road" (the sea, because whales travel on it) or "pen-blood" (ink, because it runs through a pen like blood through the body), but sometimes kennings include very obscure references, often to other tales from mythology or to shadowy semi-historical legends and characters. I have done the

task of "unpacking" (or rather, fully translating) kennings and other allusive references for the reader, and thus it has usually been necessary to write lines that are longer in English than they are in Old Norse. Note also that the articles that English uses—*a*, *an*, *the*—are practically absent from the archaic language of the Eddic poems, and require additional space in the line in English.

Many of the characters in these poems, especially major gods such as Odin, are referred to by many different names in the Old Norse text. I have referred to each character by one name instead, so as to reduce confusion about who is acting or speaking. At times, I have allowed the characters to be called "daughter of Buthli" or "son of Odin," as they often are in the original Old Norse, but only when the surrounding context makes it clear who is meant.

The poems often make it clear who is speaking, usually by inserting something like *Loki kvath* ("Loki said") before a stanza. However, this is indicated more clearly and consistently in some poems than in others, and where a speaker is not indicated, I have inserted the name of the speaker into the stanza itself: for example, "But Helgi said, 'Do not fear . . . ,'" in a stanza where the original Old Norse text does not name the speaker at all. At times, especially in parts of the very old *Atlakvitha* and *Hamthismal*, I have had to make educated guesses (or an occasional silent correction) as to which character is meant to be speaking, but I do not believe that any of these guesses are controversial. Similarly, in poems where one speaker refers to him- or herself both as "I" and as "he" or "she" (this is especially true of the witch in *Voluspa*), I have reduced unnecessary confusion for the reader by having the speaker consistently use "I."

Language and Pronunciation

The Poetic Edda was written in Old Norse, the written language of medieval Iceland and Norway. This language is the direct ancestor of today's Icelandic and Norwegian languages, and is closely related to the ancestors of Danish and Swedish. Old Norse is also a "first cousin" to other old Germanic languages, such as Old English and Old High German, and thus distantly related (as an "aunt" or "uncle") to their modern descendants such as English and German.

Old Norse was written in the Roman alphabet (the alphabet used for English and most other Western European languages

today) beginning in approximately AD 1150, with the addition of some new letters for sounds that the Roman alphabet was not designed to accommodate. In the interest of readability, particularly on digital devices, I have replaced these letters (ð, þ, æ, ø, and ǫ) with their closest equivalents from the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, and I have inserted an *e* between another consonant and *r* in characters' names (this affects especially *Balder* and *Sigerdrifa*). However, where an English translation of an Old Norse name is already widespread and popular, I have used that instead of directly transliterating the Old Norse name according to these principles: I use *Odin*, *Midgard*, and *Valhalla* instead of the more authentic or consistent *Othin*, *Mithgarth*, and *Valholl*.

In reading aloud the Old Norse names in the translation, a few ground rules should be kept in mind. The accent is always on the first syllable of a word, thus *AS-gard*, not *as-GARD*, and *JOT-un-heim*, not *jot-UN-heim*, and so on. For consonants, a few additional comments should be enough to allow English speakers to read them naturally:

f is pronounced as *v* unless at the beginning of a word or doubled; thus the name of *Fafnir* is pronounced close to *FOV-near*, and *Sigerdrifa* as *SIG-er-DREEV-ah*.

g is pronounced "hard" as in *go*, never "soft" as in *gin*; thus the second syllable of *Regin* is like that of *begin*, not like the liquor *gin*.

h can occur in the combinations *Hl (Hlymdalir)*, *Hr (Hrauthung)*, and *Hv (Hvergelmir)*. Readers who wish to sound authentic can train their tongue by holding the *h*-sound in *he* for a second and then saying *l*, *r*, or *v*. With a little practice the combinations become easy to make (see also *v*, below).

j is pronounced as the English *y* in young, or the German *j* in *ja;* thus *Jotunheim* is pronounced *Yoat-un-hame*.

th is pronounced as the English *th*; thus *Thor* is correctly pronounced as it is usually pronounced in English (his name is not pronounced like *tore* or *tour*, as it is in modern Scandinavian languages or German).

v is pronounced as the English *v* in *very*. It is possible that a *v* after another consonant was pronounced as *w* (as in Afrikaans today), so *Hvergelmir* would begin with the *hw*-sound of older American English "where," and *Svanhild* would be pronounced as *SWAN-hild*.

Vowels are pronounced as in Spanish, so *a* is the *o* of American English *got*, *e* is the *e* of *pet*, *i* is the *ee* of *feet*, *o* is approximately the *oa* in *boat* (pronouncing this word with a Wisconsin accent will be nearer the actual Scandinavian pronunciation), and *u* is the *oo* of *boot*. The vowel *y* is similar to *u*, but further forward in the mouth, like the German *ü* or the vowel in a "surfer" pronunciation of *dude* or *tune*. The letter *y* is not used as a consonant in Old Norse (see *j*, above).

The combination *au* is pronounced like the *ou* of *house*, while *ei* is the *ai* of *rain*, and *ey* is similar to the *oy* in *boy* (more authentically, the German *äu* or the Norwegian *øy*).

The Text

By the time the earliest manuscripts in Norway and Iceland were written (ca. AD 1150), belief in the gods such as Odin and Thor was a memory as old as the Civil War is in America today. Iceland was formally converted to Christianity in the year AD 1000, and Norway was converted piecemeal in the period between AD 995 and 1020.

So it is surprising to learn that in approximately the year AD 1270—almost 300 years since the last sacrifices to the Norse gods had been made anywhere in Iceland—several poems concerning pre-Christian gods and heroes were written down there, in a manuscript known as the *Codex Regius* (or, in Icelandic, as *Konungsbok*). These poems make up the majority of the translations presented in this book, with one excluded, and with four poems from other manuscripts added (see the following section, "What Is Included in This Translation"). Together, these poems about the Norse gods and heroes make up the Poetic Edda.

It is notable that the Poetic Edda offers us only myths and some general advice for living; it does not give us more than the most vague clues about prayers or rituals. This is not surprising, since it was copied by Christian hands. Consider that parents today may read their children stories from the Greek myths, without having any fear that their children will grow up to believe in Zeus, since no one around them takes these myths seriously. Similarly, the people of Iceland in the 1200s must have been so firmly converted to Christianity, and paganism must have been such a distant memory, that whoever wrote down these myths was probably doing so out of antiquarian interest rather than out of religious belief.

The *Codex Regius* manuscript itself is a copy of an earlier manuscript, probably from around the year AD 1200; this dating is based on hints such as the way the spelling becomes haphazardly more archaic in some words than in others (by analogy, think of modernizing a centuries-old printing of Shakespeare's plays by hand, but sometimes forgetting to update the spelling of words like "olde" to "old," or to change a "thou" to "you"). Additionally, many of the poems are cited in the same or very similar form by Snorri Sturluson (AD 1178–1241) in his Prose Edda, composed in approximately AD 1225. This assures us that the poems in *Codex Regius* were composed, at the latest, in the early 1200s, but the language of some poems is so archaic that they must have been composed in some form before (or shortly after) the conversion of Iceland to Christianity in AD 1000.

Atlakvitha and *Hamthismal*, two of the heroic poems, are almost certainly the oldest poems in the Poetic Edda, and were probably composed before AD 900 in Norway. Some of the poems about the gods (especially *Voluspa*, *Havamal*, *Vafthruthnismal*, and *Thrymskvitha*) also include linguistic features that suggest they were composed before AD 1000, and some (especially *Havamal* and *Rigsthula*) have words and references to social conventions that also demonstrate they were originally composed in Norway. But in spite of the fact that the poems were probably composed in the Viking Age, and certainly reflect Viking Age traditions, it is unlikely that they were not modified, enlarged, or shortened as they were passed down over the succeeding centuries.

Finally, a note on the translation: Certain words pose problems to a translator who wishes to retain the sense of an original text that is sometimes surprisingly frank and informal in tone. One word that has been especially difficult to render satisfactorily is *argr*, a highly pejorative adjective implying a lack of manly qualities, and, especially, imputing to another a desire for a passive role in sex with a male. Comparable expressions in English and other modern languages tend to shift decade by decade and are often highly inflammatory. I have chosen to translate the word into English as "sissy," which strikes me as acceptably informal, even if it does not quite convey the word's full range of meaning.

What Is Included in This Translation

This translation includes all the poems and prose material from the *Codex Regius* manuscript, with one exception. One of the heroic poems, *Atlamal*, has been excluded, since its story is redundant with the superior, and much older, *Atlakvitha*. As one of the longest poems in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, too much space would have been devoted to *Atlamal* to justify the inclusion of a poem that casual readers would probably find the least interesting.

As in most other translations of the Poetic Edda, four poems about the gods that do not appear in the *Codex Regius*, but which are found in other medieval Icelandic manuscripts, have been included because of their similarity in metrical form and content to the poems of the *Codex Regius*. These are *Baldrs draumar*, *Rigsthula*, *Voluspa en skamma* (or *Hyndluljoth*), and *Grottasongr.*

Further Reading

The following books are recommended for readers who wish to become more closely acquainted with the Eddic poems, Norse myth or literature more broadly, or the Old Norse language.

Barnes, Michael. *A New Introduction to Old Norse*. 3 vols. Viking Society for Northern Research, 2008.

The most accessible and complete resource for anyone who wants to learn the Old Norse language.

Cook, Robert (translator). *Njal's Saga*. Penguin Classics, 2002.

The most famous of the Icelandic sagas. Its action takes place in Viking Age Iceland and Norway, the same culture that produced the Poetic Edda.

Edwards, Cyril (translator). *The Nibelungenlied*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2010.

The *Nibelungenlied* is an epic poem in Middle High German that relates a very different version of the story of the heroes of the Volsung and Gjukung families from the latter half of the Poetic Edda.

Edwards, Paul, and Hermann Palsson (translators). *Seven Viking Romances*. Penguin Classics, 1986.

A collection of adventure stories, written in medieval Iceland but set in the Viking Age and earlier. These sagas (especially *Arrow-Odd's Saga* and *Gautrek's Saga*) have many mythical elements in common with the Poetic Edda, and even some of the gods take part in the action.

Faulkes, Anthony (translator). *Edda*. Everyman's Library, 1995.

A translation not of the Poetic Edda but of the Prose Edda, a work by Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241) that summarizes many of the same mythological traditions. This particular translation is very highly recommended.

Finch, R. G. (translator). *Volsunga saga*. Nelson, 1965.

This is the best available translation of *Volsunga saga*, an Old Norse saga that retells the story of the Volsungs that is related in the hero-poems of the Poetic Edda.

Haymes, Edward R. (translator). *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*. Garland, 1988.

A sprawling, medieval Norse saga, which includes many alternative versions of the myths related in the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda.

Kellogg, Robert, Jane Smiley, et al. (editors). *The Sagas of Icelanders*. Penguin Classics, 2001.

A collection of Icelandic sagas set in Viking Age Scandinavia. *Egil's Saga* is particularly recommended for its sweeping plot and in-depth look inside medieval Norse culture.

Ringler, Dick (translator). *Beowulf: A New Translation for Oral Delivery*. Hackett, 2007.

A remarkably well-done translation of *Beowulf*, an Old English poem that relates a traditional story distantly related to the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda.

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion of the North*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964.

Not an easy book to find outside of large university libraries, but the most useful and complete secondary resource available in English.

Poems about Gods and Elves

Voluspa (The Prophecy of Ragnarok)

Voluspa (literally "The Witch's Prophecy") is told through the person of a deceased witch or soothsayer (*volva*), awakened by the god Odin and interviewed for information on the beginning and end of the world. The poem contains the somewhat infamous "Catalogue of the Dwarves" (st. 10–16), a list purporting to name all these creatures, which was mined by J. R. R. Tolkien for the names of characters in his imaginary world. Two versions of *Voluspa* are preserved, one in the *Codex Regius* alongside the bulk of the remainder of the Eddic poems, and one in isolated context in *Hauksbok*, a later manuscript. The poem is also quoted extensively in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, and occasionally the text in the other manuscripts can be corrected from that source. The following translation follows the text of *Codex Regius*, and does not include the additional stanzas from *Hauksbok*, which are likely to be later interpolations.

The poem is highly allusive, and the witch often refers to stories that she does not tell in their entirety. In particular, the story of the first war (st. 21–24) is told in only the vaguest detail, but seems to have involved fighting between the *Aesir* gods and the *Vanir* gods. In stanzas 25–26, we also see an allusion to a story that is told more fully in the Prose Edda (see translation by Faulkes under "Further Reading" in the Introduction), of a giant who built a wall around Asgard but demanded Odin's wife as his price. The gods accepted his service, but cheated him out of his prize; in stanza 26 Thor seems to reject their deceitfulness and calls for a straight fight.

The use of a spear made from the mistletoe "tree" to kill the god Balder (st. 31–32) has been interpreted in various ways; most scholars have seen it as evidence that this poem was composed

in Iceland (where there are few trees, and mistletoe might be mistakenly thought to be a tree).

Large drop capitals have been inserted at the beginning of stanzas when the witch abruptly changes subject.

Voluspa

1 HEED MY WORDS,
all classes of men,
you greater and lesser
children of Heimdall.
You summoned me, Odin,
to tell what I recall
of the oldest deeds
of gods and men.

2 I remember the giants
born so long ago;
in those ancient days
they raised me.
I remember nine worlds,
nine giantesses,
and the seed
from which Yggdrasil sprang.

3 It was at the very beginning,
it was Ymir's time,
there was no sand, no sea,
no cooling waves,
no earth,
no sky,
no grass,
just Ginnungagap.

4 But Odin and his brothers
created the earth,
it was they
who made Midgard.
The sun shone from the south
upon the stones of their hall,

and the land turned green
with growing plant-life.

5 The sun, companion of the moon,
shone from the south,
as the heavenly horses
pulled it east to west.
The sun did not yet know
where it rested at evening,
the stars did not yet know
their places in the sky,
the moon did not yet know
what kind of power it had.

6 Then all the gods
went to their thrones,
those holy, holy gods,
and came to a decision:
they named
the night and the hours,
the morning,
the midday,
the afternoon and evening,
so they could tell the time.

7 The gods had their meeting
at Ithavoll,
where they built
temples and high shrines;
they made workshops,
they made treasures,
they made tongs
and other tools.

8 They played in the grass,
they were cheerful;
they had no
lack of gold,
till three
giantesses came,
fiendish giantesses
from Jotunheim.

9 Then all the gods
went to their thrones,
those holy, holy gods,
and came to a decision:
they would make
the lord of the dwarves
out of Ymir's blood
and his rotting limbs.

10 Then they made Motsognir,
he was the lord
of all the dwarves,
and next they made Durin.
They made many
man-like little creatures,
dwarves of the earth,
and Durin named them:

11 Nyi and Nithi,
Northri and Suthri,
Austri and Vestri,
Althjof, Dvalin,
Bivor, Bavor,
Bombur, Nori,
An and Anar,
Ai, Mjothvitnir,

12 Veig and Gandalf,
Vindalf, Thrain,
Thekk and Thorin,
Thror, Vit, and Lit,
Nar and Nyrath,
Regin and Rathsvith,
now I've named
the dwarves correctly;

13 Fili, Kili,
Fundin, Nali,
Hepti, Vili,
Hannar, Sviur,
Frar, Hornbori,

Fraeg and Loni,
Aurvang, Jari,
Oakenshield.

14 Now the names
of Dvalin's family,
the dwarves descended
from Lofar, as men tell:
The ones who left
their stone halls
for a home
on Joruvoll:

15 These were Draupnir
and Dolgthrasir,
Har, Haugspori,
Hlevang, Gloi,
Skirfir, Virfir,
Skafith, Ai,

16 Alf and Yngvi,
Oakenshield,
Fjalar and Frosti,
Fith and Ginnar.
The names of these dwarves,
the descendants of Lofar,
will be famous
as long as the world exists.

17 THREE GODS,
powerful and passionate,
left Asgard
for Midgard.
They found Ask and Embla,
weak,
fateless,
in that land.

18 They had no breath,
no soul,
no hair, no voice,
they looked inhuman.
Odin gave them breath,
Honir gave them souls,
Loth gave them hair
and human faces.

19 I know an ash tree,
named Yggdrasil,
a high tree, speckled
with white clay;
dewdrops fall from it
upon the valleys;
it stands, forever green,
above Urth's well.

20 Three wise women
live there,
by that well
under that tree.
Urth is named one,
another is Verthandi,
the third is named Skuld.
They carve men's fates,
they determine destiny's laws,
they choose the lifespan
of every human child,
and how each life will end.

21 I remember the first murder
ever in the world,
when Gullveig
was pierced by spears
and burned
in Odin's hall.
They burned her three times,
she was reborn three times;
often killed—not a few times!—
still she would live again.

22 They named her Heith
when she came into their homes,
a sorceress who foresaw good things.
She knew magic,
she knew witchcraft,
she practiced witchcraft.
She was the pride
of an evil family.

23 Then all the gods
went to their thrones,
those holy, holy gods,
and came to a decision,
about whether they should endure
Gullveig's depradations
or whether they
should seek revenge.

24 Odin let a spear fly
and shot it into the fray;
that was the first war
ever in the world.
The outer wall
of Asgard was broken.
The Vanir knew war-magic,
they trampled the valleys.

25 Then all the gods
went to their thrones,
those holy, holy gods,
and came to a decision:
all the air would be poisoned
with their deceit,
or Odin's wife
would have to be married to a giant.

26 Thor alone
was in the mood to fight;
he does not take it lightly
when he hears of such things:
broken promises,

broken oaths and vows,
such false speech
as even the gods had uttered.

27 I KNOW WHERE HEIMDALL
hid his ear
under the heaven-bright
holy branches of Yggdrasil.
I see a river that feeds
the muddy waterfall
where Odin's eye hides.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

28 I sat alone
when that ancient one came to me,
Odin of the Aesir,
and he looked into my eye.
What do you seek from me, Odin?
Why do you seek me, Odin?
Odin, I know
where you hid your eye
in the shining waters
of the well of Mimir.
But Mimir can drink every morning
from those waters
where your own eye drowns.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

29 Odin opened my eyes
to rings and necklaces,
in exchange he got wisdom
and prophecy.
I saw more and more,
looking out over all the worlds.

30 I saw Valkyries
come from far away,
ready to ride
to the homes of the gods.

Skuld held a shield,
and Skogul another,
Gunn, Hild, Gondul,
and Geirskogul.
Now the Valkyries
are counted,
ready to ride
to the earth, the Valkyries.

31 I saw Balder,
the bloodied victim,
Odin's son,
resigned to his fate.
There stood
the mistletoe,
growing slender and fair,
high above the plain.

32 That tree,
which seemed harmless,
caused a terrible sorrow
when Hoth took a shot.
Balder's brother
was born soon thereafter,
he was Odin's son; he took vengeance
while still just one night old.

33 He had never washed his hands
nor combed his hair
when he put Balder's killer
on the funeral pyre.
Frigg wept
in Fensalir
for the woe of Valhalla.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

34 I saw a prisoner
lying in a certain wood,
the liar himself,
none other than Loki.
There sits Sigyn, his wife,

although she finds no glee
in her husband.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

35 A river falls from the east,
full of daggers and swords,
through valleys of poison.
It is named Slith.

36 There stands
north of the dark valleys
a golden hall
of the kin of Sindri,
and another stands
at Okolnir,
the beer-hall of a giant
named Brimir.

37 I saw a hall that stood
far from the sun
on the beaches of corpses;
the doors face north.
Drops of poison
fall through the roof;
its walls are encircled
by serpents.

38 I saw oathbreakers
wading in
those thick streams,
and murderers,
and those who seduce
others' lovers.
There Nithhogg
sucks the corpses of the fallen,
snaps them in his jaws.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

39 In the east sat an aged giantess,
in Ironwood,
and there she raised
Fenrir's brood.

Among them
is a certain one
who bites the moon
in a troll's shape.

40 Dead men
are filled with life,
the home of the gods
turns red with gore,
the sun shines black
through the summers,
the weather is never cheerful.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

41 A giant, a herder by trade,
sits there on a burial mound,
striking a harp,
he is the cheerful Eggther.
A bright red rooster
named Fjalar
sings near him
in Birdwood.

42 Near the Aesir
sings the rooster named Golden-Comb,
he wakes the men
who fight for Odin, Lord of Battle.
But another sings
below the earth,
a soot-red rooster
in the halls of Hel.

43 Fenrir howls terribly
before the doors to Hel;
the wolf will break its bonds
and run.
I know much wisdom,
I see deep in the future,
all the way to Ragnarok,
a dark day for the gods.

44 Brothers will fight one another
and kill one another,
cousins will break peace
with one another,
the world will be a hard place to live in.
It will be an age of adultery,
an age of the axe, an age of the sword,
an age of storms, an age of wolves,
shields will be cloven.
Before the world sinks in the sea,
there will be no man left
who is true to another.

45 The giants are at play,
and the gods' fate is kindled
at the blast
of Gjallarhorn:
Heimdall blows that horn hard,
holds it high aloft,
Odin speaks
with Mimir's head.

46 The old tree sighs
when the giant shakes it—
Yggdrasil still stands,
but it trembles.

47 Fenrir howls terribly
before the doors to Hel;
the wolf will break its bonds
and run.
I know much wisdom,
I see deep in the future,
all the way to Ragnarok,
a dark day for the gods.

48 Hrym advances from the east
with a shield before him,
and the Midgard-serpent
is in a monstrous rage.

The serpent beats the waves,
and the eagle screams eagerly,
splitting corpses with its pale beak.
Naglfar, the giants' ship, is released.

49 That ship sails from the east,
bearing giants
over the sea,
and Loki is its captain.
The giants are coming
together with Fenrir,
and Loki too is with them
on that voyage.

50 What news from the gods?
What news from the elves?
All Jotunheim is roaring,
the Aesir are in counsel,
and the dwarves,
creatures of the mountains,
tremble by their doors of stone.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

51 Surt comes from the south
with a bright light in his hand,
yes, the sun shines upon
the sword in his grasp.
The mountains collapse,
the trolls fall,
men walk the roads to Hel,
and the skies divide above.

52 Then comes
the second sorrow of Frigg,
when Odin goes
to fight the wolf,
and Frey goes to fight
the giant Surt.
Then Odin, Frigg's husband,
will fall to Fenrir.

53 Then comes the great
son of Odin, Vithar,
to fight, to avenge
his father on the wolf.
He shoves his sword
into the mouth of Fenrir,
all the way to the heart,
and thus is Odin avenged.

54 Then Thor comes,
Earth's son,
Odin's son,
to fight the Midgard-serpent—
the protector of Midgard
will kill that serpent in his rage.
But all humankind
will die out of the world
when Thor falls
after only nine steps,
struck down by the venom
of the honorless serpent.

55 The sun turns black,
the earth sinks into the sea,
the bright stars
fall out of the sky.
Flames scorch
the leaves of Yggdrasil,
a great bonfire
reaches to the highest clouds.

56 Fenrir howls terribly
before the doors to Hel;
the wolf will break its bonds
and run.
I know much wisdom,
I see deep in the future,
all the way to Ragnarok,
a dark day for the gods.

57 I SEE THE EARTH
rise a second time
from out of the sea,
green once more.
Waterfalls flow,
and eagles fly overhead,
hunting for fish
among the mountain peaks.

58 The Aesir meet
on Ithavoll
and regard
the bones of the Midgard-serpent,
and there they recall
the great events of Ragnarok,
and Odin's
old wisdom.

59 There they will find once more
the wonderful
golden game pieces
in the grass,
which they had once played with
in the earliest days.

60 Fields will bear harvest
without labor,
all sickness will disappear,
Balder will come back.
Hoth and Balder
will live in Odin's hall,
as well as other gods.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

61 Then Honir will speak
forth his prophecies,
and the two sons of Odin,
the two brothers,
will inhabit the heavens.
Have you learned enough yet, Allfather?

62 I see a hall standing there,
more beautiful than sunlight,
thatched with gold,
at Gimle.
There bold men
will dwell
and enjoy cheer
throughout their lives.

63 Then the dark dragon
will come flying
down from the dark mountains,
that glistening serpent.
Nithhogg will bear corpses
in his wings
as he flies over that valley . . .
now I must retire.

Havamal (The Counsel of Odin the One-Eyed)

The text called *Havamal* (literally "Words of the One-Eyed," or "Words of the High One," either way a reference to Odin) appears to be sewn together from perhaps five or six earlier poems; the first, *Gestathattr* ("The Guest Part"), comprises roughly stanzas 1–81 and is the most famous part of the poem. This might be considered a Norse equivalent of the Book of Proverbs, containing as it does a series of disconnected stanzas encouraging wisdom and moderation in living one's life. *Gestathattr* is followed by *Domi Othins* ("Odin's Love Adventures"), which contains general advice about love, and two stories told from the perspective of the god as he tries (once succeeding, once failing) to secure the love of giant women (he fails to seduce Billing's daughter, but he wins over Gunnloth, who gives him the mead of poetry). The poem then segues into *Loddfafnismal* ("Words for Loddfafnir") another series of advice stanzas addressed to an unknown character named Loddfafnir. These sections are followed in turn by *Runatal* ("Tally of the Runes"), in which Odin speaks of the mysterious fashion in which he sacrificed himself to himself for the knowledge of the runic alphabet, and finally the *Ljothatal* ("Tally of Songs," st. 146–63), a list of the eighteen magical spells that Odin claims to know. Most stanzas convey one single thought, but some (e.g. st. 75) comprise two or three seemingly unrelated proverbs. The order of stanzas 88 and 89 has been reversed in order to convey their meaning more clearly, but the original numbering is indicated.

Havamal

1 AT EVERY DOORWAY
before you enter,
you should look around,
you should take a good look around—
for you never know
where your enemies
might be seated within.

2 Hail to a good host!
A guest has come inside,
where should he sit?
He is impatient,
standing on the threshold,
ready to try his luck.

3 He needs a fire,
the one who has just come in,
his knees are shivering.
Food and dry clothes
will do him well,
after his journey over the mountains.

4 He needs water,
the one who has just arrived,
dry clothes, and a warm welcome
from a friendly host—
and if he can get it,
a chance to listen and be listened to.

5 A man needs wisdom
if he plans to wander widely;
life is easier at home.
He'll be laughed at
if he sits among the wise
and has nothing to say.

6 A wise man
is not showy about his wisdom;
he guards it carefully.
He is silent when he comes
to a stranger's home.
The wise man seldom wanders into harm,
for you can never have
a more faithful friend
than a good supply of wisdom.

7 The watchful guest,
when he arrives for a meal,
should keep his mouth shut,

listening with his ears
and watching with his eyes—
that's how the wise get wiser.

8 A man is happy
if he finds praise and friendship
within himself.
You can never be sure
of where you stand
in someone else's heart.

9 A man is happy
if he finds good advice
within himself.
Many men have received
bad advice
by trusting someone else.

10 A traveler cannot bring
a better burden on the road
than plenty of wisdom.
It will prove better than money
in an unfamiliar place—
wisdom is the comfort of the poor.

11 A traveler cannot bring
a better burden on the road
than plenty of wisdom,
and he can bring
no worse a burden
than too much alcohol.

12 There is not as much good
as men claim there is
in alcohol for one's well-being.
A man knows less
as he drinks more,
and loses more and more of his wisdom.

13 It's as if a memory-stealing bird
flies overhead while you drink,
and steals your mind away.

I myself have been trapped
in that bird's feathers,
when I drank at Gunnloth's home.

14 I was drunk,
I was too drunk,
at Fjalar's house.
The best kind of feast
is the one you go home from
with all your wits about you.

15 A noble man should
be silent, thoughtful,
and bold in battle.
But every man should also
be cheerful and happy,
till the inevitable day of death.

16 An unwise man
thinks he'll live forever
if only he can avoid a fight,
but old age
will give him no peace,
even if weapons do.

17 A foolish man
misuses his mouth—
he talks too much, or says nothing.
As soon as
he gets a drink,
he'll say anything he knows.

18 Only a man
who is wide-traveled
and has wandered far
can know something
about how other men think.
Such a man is wise.

19 Don't hold on to the mead-horn,
but drink your fair share.
Say something useful or stay quiet.

And no one else
will judge you poorly
if you go to sleep early.

20 A gluttonous man,
unless he watches himself,
will eat to his own detriment.
Wise men will often
ridicule a fool
on account of his belly.

21 Even cows know
when they should go home
and leave behind the fields,
but an unwise man
does not know
the measure of his own appetite.

22 A stupid man
and an undisciplined one
laughs at everything.
He hasn't learned
a lesson that would do him good:
he himself isn't flawless.

23 A fool
stays awake all night
worrying about everything.
He's fatigued
when the morning comes,
and his problems remain unsolved.

24 An unwise man
thinks anyone who laughs with him
is his friend.
He doesn't understand
that the wise are mocking him,
even when he overhears them.

25 An unwise man
thinks anyone who laughs with him
is his friend,

but he won't find these friends
when he goes to court—
no one will speak on his behalf.

26 A stupid man
thinks he knows everything
if he gets himself in a tough corner.
But he doesn't even know
what he'll answer,
if men ask him questions.

27 It's best for a fool
to keep his mouth shut
among other people.
No one will know
he knows nothing,
if he says nothing.
Ill-informed people
are also the ones
who don't know when to stop talking.

28 You will seem wise
if you know the answer,
and know how to explain it.
People are not able
to keep a secret
of what they hear about other people.

29 You will hurt yourself
with all your talking
if you never close your mouth.
A hasty tongue,
unless it's disciplined,
often earns its owner punishment.

30 No one should
ridicule anyone else,
even if he owes him money.
Many a man seems wise
if he is never questioned,
but he may prove otherwise.

31 A man may seem wise
if he pokes fun at another
when the other man is away.
But the man who talks
behind another man's back
is a fool, even if his listeners laugh.

32 Many men
are kind,
but can be driven to fight.
There will always
be conflict between men:
where there's more than one, there's a fight.

33 You should eat
your meals early,
unless you're visiting a friend.
A hungry man
sits and gets sluggish,
and his wits are impaired.

34 It's a long and crooked walk
to a bad friend,
even if he lives nearby.
But it's an easy road
to a good friend,
no matter how long the journey.

35 You should keep moving.
You should never be a guest forever
in any one place.
Your welcome will wear out
if you stay too long
beneath another's roof.

36 It's better to have a home,
even if it's little—
everyone should call somewhere "home."
Even if you own just two goats
beneath a faulty roof,
that's still better than begging.

37 Better to have a home,
even if it's little—
everyone should call somewhere "home."
Your heart will be wounded
if you have to beg for every meal
from somebody else.

38 Never go
even a single step
without a weapon at your side;
you never know
when you might find yourself
in need of a spear.

39 I have never met a man so generous
nor so hospitable
that he would not welcome repayment,
nor have I met a man
so giving that he'd turn down
a thing offered in return.

40 Do not be so sparing
in using your money
that you don't use it for your own needs.
Often what you save for your children
will end up in the hands of your enemies—
many things will go worse than you expect.

41 Friends should provide their friends
with weapons and clothing;
this kind of generosity shows.
Generous mutual giving
is the key
to lifelong friendship.

42 Be a friend
to your friend,
and repay each gift with a gift.
Repay laughter
with laughter,
repay treachery with treachery.

43 Be a friend
to your friend
and also to his friend,
but never be a friend
to the enemy
of your friend.

44 If you have a good friend,
and really trust him,
and want good to come of your friendship,
you should speak your mind with him,
exchange gifts,
visit him often.

45 But if you have another friend,
and you mistrust him
but want to benefit from him, nonetheless—
you should speak to him kindly,
flatter him,
and repay his treachery with your own.

46 This same friend,
if you mistrust him,
and suspect him to be false in his words:
you should talk with him,
laugh with him,
but repay just what he gives you.

47 I was young once,
I walked alone,
and I became lost on my way.
I felt like I was rich
when I met another traveler—
people's joy is in other people.

48 Kind, brave people
live best,
they never nurture a grudge.
It's unwise
to spend your life worrying,
dreading your responsibilities.

49 I gave my clothes
to two scarecrows,
once when I walked in a field.
They thought they were human
as soon as they had clothes on;
a naked man feels ashamed.

50 A fir-tree decays,
standing over a farm,
no longer protected by bark and needles.
A person is the same way
if nobody loves him;
how will he live much longer?

51 The friendship
among false friends
burns warmly for five days,
but then it's extinguished
by the sixth day,
and the friendship is over.

52 You should not give
only big gifts;
often a little thing will win you favor.
I have won friends
with just half a loaf of bread
and a bowl of soup.

53 Where the beaches are small,
it's a small sea that washes them—
and so it is with little minds.
Not everyone
is equally wise,
but the average is moderately wise.

54 You should be
only a little wise,
never too wise.
The happiest people
throughout their lives
are the moderately wise.

55 You should be
only a little wise,
never too wise.
A wise man's heart
is seldom glad
if he's truly wise.

56 You should be
only a little wise,
never too wise.
It's best not to know
your fate beforehand;
you'll live happier if you don't.

57 A torch is lit by another
and burns till it's burned out;
a fire is kindled by another fire.
A man becomes wise
by speaking with other men,
but foolish by keeping to himself.

58 Rise early, if you want
to take another man's
property, or his life.
A sleeping wolf
seldom wins a sheep,
or a sleeping warrior a victory.

59 Rise early
if you have no one to work for you,
and get straight to work.
You lose more than time
if you sleep when it dawns;
for the early riser, wealth is half-won.

60 You should know how
to dry logs for firewood
and bark for roofing,
and also this:
how to measure
time and the seasons.

61 You should always go out
with your hair combed
and a meal in your belly,
even if you can't afford good clothes.
You should not be ashamed
of your shoes and pants,
nor of your horse,
even if it's not a good one.

62 A hungry eagle snaps his beak
and stretches out his neck,
when the sea comes into sight.
People get the same look about them
when they walk among strangers
and have no one to speak well of them.

63 If you want to be called wise,
you should know how
to ask and answer wisely.
Tell your secret to one person,
never to two—
everyone knows, if three people know.

64 A wise man
should use his abilities
only in moderation.
Otherwise, when he
is in battle, he'll learn
that no one is bravest of all.

65 You will often
get repayment in kind
for the words you speak to others.

66 I have come too early
to some events
and too late to others.
The drinks were all gone,
or else not even made;
a hated man gets little hospitality.

67 Now and then
I've been invited to a friend's home,
as long as I had no need for food,
or as long as I could make
my inhospitable host's cellars
fuller rather than emptier.

68 Fire is best
for mortals,
and sunshine—
and also good health,
if you have it,
and living beyond reproach.

69 No one is totally wretched,
even if his health is bad—
some find happiness in their children,
some in their kin,
some in their money,
some in work well done.

70 Better to be alive,
no matter what, than dead—
only the living enjoy anything.
I saw a rich man's house,
but it was on fire,
and he lay dead outside the door.

71 A limping man can ride a horse,
a handless man can herd,
a deaf man can fight and win.
It's better even to be blind
than fuel for the funeral pyre;
what can a dead man do?

72 Better to have a son than not,
even if he's born late in life,
even if he's born after you die.
You'll rarely see memorials or graves
standing near the road
that were raised for men without sons.

73 Two men will defeat one;
your tongue can endanger your head.
In every hand hidden by a cloak,
I expect to see a weapon.

74 The seaman is glad at evening,
looking forward to his dinner,
with just a short distance to row home.
But an autumn night is untrustworthy.
Many things can get worse
in only five days,
and even more in a month.

75 The ignorant man
does not know how little he knows.
You become foolish by listening to fools.
One man is rich,
another man is poor,
neither has the other to blame.

76 Cows die,
family die,
you will die the same way.
But a good reputation
never dies
for the one who earns it well.

77 Cows die,
family die,
you will die the same way.
I know only one thing
that never dies:
the reputation of the one who's died.

78 I saw big herds of cattle
owned by a rich man's sons;
now they carry a beggar's staff.
Wealth is like
the twinkling of an eye—
no friend could be more faithless.

79 If an unwise man
chances upon money
or a woman's love,
he will grow more arrogant
but not more intelligent;
he will be deceived about his own worth.

80 What you ask of the runes
will prove true;
they are gifts of the Aesir,
made by the gods
and painted by Odin.
You'll learn best with your mouth shut.

81 Don't praise the day until it's night,
don't praise your wife until she's buried,
don't praise the sword till after the fight,
nor your daughter till she's married,
don't praise the ice until it's crossed,
nor the ale until you're sloshed.

82 Chop wood when the wind blows,
row your boat on the sea,
court a lover at nighttime
(for the day has many eyes).
Value a ship for its speed,
a shield for its protection,
a sword for its sharpness,
and a woman for her kiss.

83 Drink ale by the fire,
skate on the ice,
buy a thin horse
and a rusty sword.
Give your horse food,
and let your dog feed itself.

84 No man should trust
the words of a girl,
nor anything a woman says.
Women's hearts are molded

on a wobbly wheel.
Deception lurks in their words.

85 A breaking bow,
a burning fire,
a howling wolf,
a cawing crow,
a grunting pig,
a rootless tree,
a swelling wave,
a boiling kettle,

86 a flying spear,
a crashing wave,
one-night-old ice,
a striped snake,
the words of a bride in bed,
a broken sword,
a playful bear,
the child of a king,

87 a sick calf,
a stubborn servant,
a prophet who foresees good things,
a corpse on the battlefield,

(89) your brother's killer
(even if you meet him in public),
a half-burned house,
a horse that's too fast
(remember, a horse is unusable
if only one foot breaks)—
may you never be so trusting
that you trust all these things.

(88) Do not put too much trust
in your newly planted crops,
nor in your child too early—
weather will shape the field
and whim will shape the child,
and neither will stay the same.

90 Take care not to love
a deceitful woman,
it is like driving an unshod horse,
a playful, young,
poorly-tamed foal,
across slippery ice,
or like sailing a ship
in a wild wind,
or trying to catch a reindeer on foot
after the mountains thaw.

91 I'll speak plainly now, since
I know both men and women:
men lie to women.
We speak most eloquently
when we tell the biggest lies,
and seduce even wise women with lies.

92 A man should speak eloquently
and offer gifts
to a woman whose love he wants.
Praise the body
of a beautiful woman;
you will win her if you praise her.

93 No man
should mock another
for falling in love.
Love-sickness
often strikes harder
on a wise man than a fool.

94 No man
should mock another
for falling in love;
love is strong enough
to make a fool
out of a man who once was wise.

95 Only you know
what dwells in your heart
when you are alone;
but nothing is worse
for a wise person
than to have nothing to love.

96 I experienced this
when I waited among the reeds
and my lover did not come to me.
That wise girl
was my flesh and my heart,
though I could not call her my own.

97 I found Billing's daughter,
fair as a sun-ray,
asleep on her bed.
The life of a lord
seemed as nothing to me
unless I could live with that woman.

98 "You should come back
in the evening, Odin," she said,
"if you want to woo me—
it is improper
for others to know
of such a scandal."

99 I turned back,
and thought that I
would win her.
I imagined
that I would win
the woman's love and all her joy.

100 But when I came back that night,
there was a good company of warriors
awake and ready for me.
With burning flames
and torches held high,
I was shown my miserable way out.

101 And when morning came,
and I returned,
everyone in the hall was sleeping—
and then I found a watchdog
tied to the bed
of that good woman.

102 There's many a good woman,
if you get to know her,
who'll change her mind about a man;
I learned that
when I tried
to seduce a wise woman.
That lady
showed me every kind of shame,
and I gained no wife for my trouble.

103 If you want to be very wise,
be happy at home,
and cheerful with a guest.
Cultivate wisdom,
a good memory, and eloquence,
and speak kind words often.
You'll be called a fool
if you can't say much—
that's the mark of the unwise.

104 I visited an old giant,
and now I've returned.
I didn't stay silent there.
I spoke many words
in support of my cause
at Suttung's hall.

105 Gunnloth, his daughter,
gave me a drink of his precious mead
while I sat on a golden chair.
I would later give her
a bad repayment
for her trusting mind,
for her troubled mind.

106 Giants' dwellings were
over and under me.
I used Rati's tusk
to burrow out
and gnaw away the rock—
in this way, I got out with my head.

107 I made good use
of the disguise I used;
few things are too difficult for the wise.
Now Othrerir
is rescued
from the clutches of the giants.

108 I doubt
I could have escaped
Jotunheim
if I hadn't used Gunnloth,
the good woman
who rested in my arms.

109 The next day
the frost-giants came
to ask news about Odin
in Odin's hall;
they inquired about that evildoer,
whether he was among the gods,
or whether Suttung had killed him.

110 I believe that Odin
swore an oath to them—
but who can trust Odin?
He left Suttung deceived
in his own home,
and he left Gunnloth weeping.

111 It is time to speak
on the wise man's chair
at Urth's well.
I saw and was silent,
I saw and I thought,

I listened to men's speech.
I heard about runes,
they were not silent with counsel
at Odin's hall,
in Odin's hall,
I heard them say so:

112 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Do not rise at night,
unless you're spying on your enemies,
or seeking a place to relieve yourself.

113 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Do not sleep in the arms
of a sorceress,
or else she will lock your limbs.

114 She will enchant you
so that you won't care
for advice nor a powerful man's words;
you will want neither food
nor the pleasure of friends' company,
and you will sleep full of sorrow.

115 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never seduce
another man's woman
with whispers in her ear.

116 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:

If you spend time wandering
by land or by sea,
bring plentiful provisions.

117 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never let
a bad man
know of your misfortune,
for you will never
profit at all
for telling him about it.

118 I saw
a bad woman's words
bite a man in the neck—
a lying tongue
was his death,
and not even with good cause.

119 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
If you have a friend,
and you trust him,
go and visit him often.
Weeds and high grass
will grow on a path
that nobody travels.

120 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Get a good man
to teach you the runes,
and learn a healing spell while you live.

121 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never be
the first to break
friendship with your friend.
Sadness will eat up your heart
if you have no one
you can talk to.

122 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
You should never
exchange words
with someone who won't see reason.

123 You will never
get a reward for speaking
with a bad man,
but a good man
will make you happy
with his praise.

124 Men become friends
when they can share
their minds with one another.
Anything is better
than being lied to:
a real friend will disagree with you openly.

125 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Don't speak even three words
with a man worse than you.
Often the better man will lose
when a worse man fights him.

126 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Don't make shoes,
and don't make weapons,
except for yourself;
if there's a flaw in the shoe,
or the spearshaft is crooked,
your name will be cursed.

127 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
When you are at war,
call it war,
and give your enemies no peace.

128 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never be glad
to hear bad news,
but be cheerful about good news.

129 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
You should never look up
when you're in a fight—
men who do so
may get turned to stone—
beware, or someone may curse you.

130 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:

If you want to win a good woman,
speak cheerfully with her,
and enjoy it while you do,
make promises to her,
and keep your promises,
you'll never regret winning such a prize.

131 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
I advise you to be wary,
though never fearful:
be most wary about drinking,
about other men's women,
and about a third thing:
about men and their temptation to steal.

132 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never mock,
never laugh at,
a guest nor a wanderer.

133 Those inside the house
rarely know anything
about the stranger who knocks at their door,
but there is no man so good
that he has no flaw,
nor a man so bad he's good for nothing.

134 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never laugh
at an old man.
There is often wisdom in what old men say;
wise words will often
come from a gray-bearded mouth.

From those who hang with dried skins,
those who swing with dried skins,
those who wave with dried skins.

135 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
Never spite a guest
nor be stingy with your food—
treat a poor wanderer well.

136 Otherwise it's a bitter tree
you'll find yourself hanging from
in the sight of all.
Give a beggar something,
or he will call
a curse down on your every limb.

137 I counsel you, Loddfafnir,
if you'll take my advice,
you'll profit if you learn it,
it'll do you good if you remember it:
When you drink beer,
choose the might of the earth,
for the earth is good against beer,
and fire against sickness,
oak against an irritable bowel,
wheat against magic,
an elder-tree against family quarrels,
maggots against venomous bites,
runes against distress,
ground against water.
Swear your hate beneath the moon.

138 I know that I hung
on a wind-battered tree
nine long nights,
pierced by a spear
and given to Odin,
myself to myself,
on that tree

whose roots grow in a place
no one has ever seen.

139 No one gave me food,
no one gave me drink.
At the end I peered down,
I took the runes—
screaming, I took them—
and then I fell.

140 I learned nine spells
from the famous son of Bolthorn,
the father of Bestla,
and I won a drink
of that precious mead,
poured from Othrerir.

141 My imagination expanded,
I became wise,
I grew, and I thrived.
One word chased another word
flowing from my mouth,
one deed chased another deed
flowing from my hands.

142 You will find runes,
runic letters to read,
very great runes,
very powerful runes,
which Odin painted,
and which the holy gods made,
and which Odin carved.

143 Odin carved for the gods,
and Dain for the elves,
Dvalin for the dwarves,
and Asvith for the giants;
I carved some myself.

144 Do you know how to write them?
Do you know how to read them?
Do you know how to paint them?

Do you know how to test them?
Do you know how to ask them?
Do you know how to bless them?
Do you know how to send them?
Do you know how to offer them?

145 It is better not to pray at all
than to pray for too much;
nothing will be given that you won't repay.
It is better to sacrifice nothing
than to offer too much.
Odin carved this
before the birth of humankind,
when he rose up
and returned again.

146 I know magic spells
that no woman knows
and no man, either.
The first is called "Help,"
and it will help you
in lawsuits and sadness,
and all kinds of worries.

147 I know a second spell
which men need
if they want to heal others.

148 I know a third spell;
if I have a great need
to thwart my enemies,
I dull the edges
of their weapons,
and none of their blades will bite.

149 I know a fourth spell;
if chains and locks are placed
upon my limbs,
I cast this spell
so that I can escape.
The chains burst from my hands,
the locks burst from my feet.

150 I know a fifth spell;
if I see a spear cast
into a crowd of battling foes,
it cannot fly so fast
that I can't change its course,
as long as I can see it.

151 I know a sixth spell;
if a man carves a curse against me
in runes on the root of a tree,
I call this spell down
upon that man,
and his curse harms him instead of me.

152 I know a seventh spell;
if I see a great flame
consuming a hall full of people,
it cannot burn so bright
that I cannot save those inside;
I know how to cast this spell.

153 I know an eighth spell;
it would be useful
for anyone to learn it.
When hate arises
between any two people,
I can cool their tempers.

154 I know a ninth spell;
if the need arises
for me to save a ship upon the sea,
I can calm the wind
upon the waves
and soothe the sea to sleep.

155 I know a tenth spell;
if I see witches
at play in the air,
I can cast this spell
so that they get lost,

so they can't find their skins,
so they can't find their minds.

156 I know an eleventh spell;
if I lead old friends
into a battle,
I enchant their shields
so that they will have the victory;
they will go to battle unharmed,
and return from battle unharmed.
They will come home without harm.

157 I know a twelfth spell;
if I see, hanging from a tree,
a dead man's corpse,
I carve some runes
and paint them,
and then that corpse will walk
and speak with me.

158 I know a thirteenth spell;
if I sprinkle water
upon a new-born boy,
he will never be killed
even if he goes into battle;
that man will not die from violence.

159 I know a fourteenth spell;
it allows me to count
all the gods for men.
I know the names
of all the gods and elves,
and few who are fools can say that.

160 I know a fifteenth spell;
the dwarf Thjothreyrir
cast it upon Delling's doors.
He conjured power for the gods,
and courage for the elves;
they knew Odin.

161 I know a sixteenth spell;
if I want to win over a cunning woman
and have her all to myself,
I can change the mind
of that lovely-armed beauty
and win her favor for myself.

162 I know a seventeenth spell,
to prevent a beautiful woman
from shunning me.
Loddfafnir,
all these spells would be
useful to you all your life.
They would profit you if you learned them,
they'd do you good if you remembered them,
they'd suit your needs if you could use them.

163 I know an eighteenth spell
which I will never teach
to a girl or a woman,
unless maybe to the one
I call my wife,
or my sister.
It is much better
that one alone should know this,
which is the last of the spells.

164 Now the words of the One-Eyed
are heard in Valhalla,
for the benefit of humans,
for the harm of giants;
health to you who speak them,
health to you who know them,
joy to you who learn them,
health to you who hear them.

Vafthruthnismal (Odin's Contest with Riddle-Weaver)

Vafthruthnismal involves the visit of Odin to the hall of a giant named Riddle-Weaver (Old Norse *Vafthruthnir)*, who engages Odin in a contest of mythological knowledge. The poem provides not only an interesting portrait of Odin, but, in the stanzas exchanged by Odin and Riddle-Weaver, we also learn a great deal of random information on various myths which might otherwise be unknown. *Vafthruthnismal* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

Vafthruthnismal

Odin said:

1 "Advise me now, Frigg;
I want to travel
and visit Riddle-Weaver.
I want to have
a contest about old lore
with that wise giant."

Frigg said:

2 "I would advise you, Odin,
father of battles, to stay here,
in the homes of the gods.
I don't think there's any giant
who is as wise
as Riddle-Weaver."

Odin said:

3 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
Now I want to know
what kind of hospitality
there is in Riddle-Weaver's hall."

Frigg said:

4 "Then travel safe,
and come back in one piece—
stay safe on your journeys, Odin!
May your wits serve you well
wherever you go,
when you exchange words with the giant."

5 Odin then went
to test the wisdom
of that wise giant.
Odin came to the hall
Riddle-Weaver owned,
and he went straight inside.

Odin said:

6 "Hail, Riddle-Weaver!
I have come to your hall
for the purpose of seeing you.
The first thing I want to know
is if you are wise—
or perhaps even all-knowing."

Riddle-Weaver said:

7 "Who is this man
who stands in my hall,
who is this I'm speaking to?
You won't leave my hall
unless you prove yourself
to be even wiser than I am."

Odin said:

8 "My name is Good Advisor,
and I come to your hall
thirsty from a long journey.
After my long trip,
I have need of hospitality
and a good welcome, giant."

Riddle-Weaver said:

9 "Well then, 'Good Advisor,'
why are you still standing up?
Take a seat in my hall!
Then we'll find out
who knows more,
the guest, or his wise old host."

Odin said:

10 "A poor man,
if he visits a rich man,
ought to be silent, or say only what he must.
Too much talk
will bring harm to the guest
of a grudging host."

Riddle-Weaver said:

11 "Tell me, 'Good Advisor,'
if you want to test yourself,
sitting in your seat in my hall:
What is the name
of the horse who pulls the sun
over the humans below?"

Odin said:

12 "That horse is named Skinfaxi;
he pulls the bright sun
over the humans below.
Everyone thinks he's the best horse
who lives in Midgard—
the mane of that horse always shines."

Riddle-Weaver said:

13 "Tell me, 'Good Advisor,'
if you want to test yourself,
sitting in your seat in my hall:
What is the name of the horse
who pulls the moon, east to west,
at night over the mighty gods?"

Odin said:

14 "That horse is named Hrimfaxi
who pulls the moon, east to west,
every night over the mighty gods.
The slobber from his mouth
falls to the ground every morning,
and that's the reason for the dew."

Riddle-Weaver said:

15 "Tell me, 'Good Advisor,'
if you want to test yourself,
sitting in your seat in my hall:
What is the name
of the river that separates
the lands of the gods from the giants'?"

Odin said:

16 "That river is named Ifing,
which separates the lands
of the gods from those of the giants.
That river
will run free forever;
it will never freeze over."

Riddle-Weaver said:

17 "Tell me, 'Good Advisor,'
if you want to test yourself,
sitting in your seat in my hall:
What is the name
of the valley where Surt
will lead the final battle against the gods?"

Odin said:

18 "That valley is named Vigrith,
where Surt will lead
the final battle against the gods.
It is one hundred miles long
on each side—
that's why this valley is chosen."

Riddle-Weaver said:

19 "You are wise indeed, guest!
Come sit at my bench,
let's talk together here.
Let's wager our heads
on which of us two
is wiser, here in my hall, guest."

Odin said:

20 "Tell me this first,
if your wits serve you well,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did the earth come to be,
or heaven; which one was
the first, giant?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

21 "The earth was made
from Ymir's flesh;
the rocks were made from his bones.
The sky was made from the skull
of that ice-cold giant,
the sea was made from his blood."

Odin said:

22 "Tell me this second,
if your wits serve you well,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did the moon come to be,
the one that floats over the earth,
or what about the sun, giant?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

23 "Mundilfari is the name
of the father of the moon;
he was also the sun's father.
They will float across the sky
every day, to help the humans
tell the time and season."

Odin said:

24 "Tell me this third,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did the day come to be,
or the night which passes above,
with its waxing and waning moon?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

25 "Delling is the name
of the father of the day,
and the night is Norvi's daughter.
The waxing and waning of the moon
was designed by the gods
to help tell the time and season."

Odin said:

26 "Tell me this fourth,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did the winter come to be,
or the warm summer,
when did they first come about?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

27 "Vindsval is the name
of the father of winter,
and Svasuth's the father of summer."

Odin said:

28 "Tell me this fifth,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
Who was the oldest being,
whether god or giant,
who appeared in the oldest times?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

29 "Untold years ago,
before the earth was made,
Bergelmir was born.

His father was
Thruthgelmir, and Thruthgelmir's
father was Aurgelmir."

Odin said:

30 "Tell me this sixth,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did Aurgelmir come to be,
what was the origin
of that first giant?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

31 "Drops of poison
fell from Elivagar,
they gelled, and formed the giant.
All the families of us giants
have our origin there;
that's why we're bad, through and through."

Odin said:

32 "Tell me this seventh,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did that giant,
Ymir, have children,
if he had no woman to share his bed?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

33 "They say two giants,
a man and a woman,
grew under his armpits—
one foot had a child
with the other foot,
and their son had six heads."

Odin said:

34 "Tell me this eighth,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
What is your first memory,

the earliest thing you remember?
I suspect you're all-knowing, giant."

Riddle-Weaver said:

35 "My very first memory
is of Bergelmir,
untold years
before the earth was formed.
I remember the wise giant
laid out in his coffin."

Odin said:

36 "Tell me this ninth,
if you want to be called wise,
if you know it, Riddle-Weaver:
How did the wind come to be,
the wind that blows over the sea?
It's something that is seldom seen."

Riddle-Weaver said:

37 "There is a giant eagle
named Hraesvelg,
who sits at the sky's end.
They say that it's
from his wings
the wind is blown."

Odin said:

38 "Tell me this tenth—
you must know the fate
of all the gods, wise Riddle-Weaver:
How did Njorth come to be
among the Aesir?
He has hundreds
of temples and altars—
but he was not born among the Aesir."

Riddle-Weaver said:

39 "Wise Vanir created him
in Vanaheim, and gave him
as a hostage to the Aesir.
At Ragnarok

he will go back home
to the wise Vanir."

Odin said:

40 "Tell me this eleventh:
Where is the hall where men
fight each other every day?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

41 "All the Einherjar
in Odin's hall
fight each other every day.
They kill each other,
but then ride back from battle
and sit in the evening as friends."

Odin said:

42 "Tell me this twelfth—
you must know the fate
of all the gods, wise Riddle-Weaver:
Tell me the truth
about the secrets of the giants
and the gods, you wise giant."

Riddle-Weaver said:

43 "I can tell you the truth
about the secrets of the giants
and all the gods,
for I have visited them all at home.
I've been to nine realms
beneath Hel, to realms
where the dead travel after Hel."

Odin said:

44 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
Will any humans remain alive
after Fimbulveter
has passed over Midgard?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

45 "Life and Pulsing-with-Life
will survive; they will hide
in Hoddmimir's forest.
They will eat
the morning dew,
and renew the human race."

Odin said:

46 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
How will there still be a sun
when the wolf has eaten
the one that now flies in heaven?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

47 "The sun
will have a daughter
before Fenrir eats her.
And that young sun
will travel on her mother's path
when the gods have all died."

Odin said:

48 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
Who are those young women
who fly above the sea,
who travel in the air with their craft?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

49 "There are three rivers
that fall over
those young women of Mogthrasir.
Their only happiness
is in Midgard,
though they were born among giants."

Odin said:

50 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
Which gods
will inherit Asgard,
when the fires of Ragnarok go out?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

51 "Vithar and Vali
will inhabit Asgard
when the fires of Ragnarok go out.
Mothi and Magni
will inherit Mjollnir
after Thor is killed."

Odin said:

52 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
How will Odin
lose his life
at Ragnarok?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

53 "A wolf
will swallow Odin,
but Vithar will avenge him.
He'll cut open
the wolf's cold jaws,
kill the killer of his father."

Odin said:

54 "I have traveled so much,
I have tried much,
and I have often tested the mighty.
What did Odin whisper
in Balder's ear,
before he placed him on the pyre?"

Riddle-Weaver said:

55 "No one knows
what you said
in those ancient days, in your son's ear.
I have spoken my aged wisdom,
I have told you of Ragnarok,
I have spoken with a doomed mouth.

56 "Now I know that I wagered
my head against Odin's in wisdom—
but you, Odin, are forever the wisest of all."

Grimnismal (The Words of Odin in Disguise)

Grimnismal is similar to *Vafthruthnismal,* being mostly a compilation of mythological lore and having a frame story involving Odin. In this case, Odin disguises himself under the name "Shadowed-Face" (Old Norse *Grimnir,* literally the "Cloaked One"). He is held captive in the court of a king he once favored, and delivers his mythic lore to the king's merciful young son after eight nights of being starved between two bonfires. The prose prologue and epilogue are original. *Grimnismal* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

Grimnismal

Concerning the sons of King Hrauthung

King Hrauthung had two sons. One was named Agnar and the other Geirroth. Agnar was ten years old, and Geirroth was eight. The two of them rowed out in a boat with their fishing tackle and hoped to catch some small fish, but the wind drove them far out into the sea. In the dark night they wrecked and went up on to the land, where they met a poor farmer, and they stayed there with him over the winter. The farmer's old wife fostered Agnar, but the farmer fostered Geirroth and tutored him. Early in the spring the man gave them a boat, and when he and his wife followed them down to the shore, the man spoke to Geirroth in secrecy.

The boys departed, and the wind was favorable. They came to their father's harbor, and then Geirroth, who stood foremost in the boat, sprang up on land and shoved the boat back out to sea and said: "Go wherever the trolls take you!"

The boat drifted far out to sea with Agnar, but Geirroth went inland to his father's hall. He was received well, but he learned that his father had died. So Geirroth was taken as king, and he became a famous man.

Odin and Frigg sat in Hlithskjalf and looked out over all the worlds. Odin said, "Look how your foster-son Agnar sits and fathers children on a trollwoman in a cave, while my foster-son Geirroth is king and rules the land."

Frigg said, "But Geirroth is so stingy with food that he starves his guests, if he thinks there are too many."

Odin said that this was a tremendous lie, and so he and Frigg made a wager about it. Then Frigg sent her servant Fulla to Geirroth, and had Fulla warn him that a sorceror had come to the land, but that this sorceror could be recognized by the fact that even the fiercest dog would not attack him.

It was, in fact, an idle rumor that Geirroth was miserly with his food. All the same, he ordered any man who would not be attacked by any dog to be apprehended. Odin came wearing a blue cape, and called himself Shadowed-Face, but said nothing more of himself even when asked, so the king had him tortured in an effort to extract more information from him, and had him placed between two burning fires, where he sat for eight nights.

King Geirroth had a ten-year-old son, named Agnar after the king's brother. Agnar went to this "Shadowed-Face" and gave him a full horn to drink and said he thought his father was behaving poorly, to torture a man without cause. Shadowed-Face drank, and by then the fire had grown so large that it had begun to burn his cloak. Then Shadowed-Face said:

1 "YOU'RE HOT, FIRE,
and much too big—
get away from me, flames!
My coat is getting burned,
even though I'm holding it up!
My clothing is on fire!

2 "I've sat between the fires here
for eight nights, and no one
offered or gave me food,
except Agnar alone.
Now Agnar will be the sole ruler
of the land of the Goths.

3 "Hail, Agnar,
it's the chief of the gods
who's wishing you well!
You will never be repaid
so well for one drink,
no matter how long you live.

4 “I see a holy land
which lies near those
of the gods and the elves.
In that place, Thruthheim,
Thor will live
till Ragnarok.

5 “Ull has built
good halls for himself
in Ydalir.
The gods gave Frey
the land of Alfheim
long ago, as a gift in his youth.”

6 “I know a third place
where happy gods
live beneath a silver roof.
It’s called Valaskjalf—
the place Odin
made himself in the old days.

7 “A fourth hall
is Sokkvabekk, which
the cool waves crash upon.
There Odin and Saga
drink happily every day
from golden cups.

8 “A fifth land is
Gladsheim, where gold-bright,
wide Valhalla stands.
That is where
Odin chooses from the men
killed by weapons every day.

9 “Valhalla
is easily recognized
if one comes to see it.
The hall is held up by spearshafts,
it is roofed by shields,
chainmail is on the benches.

10 "Valhalla
is easily recognized
if one comes to see it.
A wolf hangs above
the western door,
and an eagle above him.

11 "Thjassi, the mighty giant,
once lived in the sixth hall,
now known as Thrymheim.
And now Skathi,
bright bride of the gods,
lives in her father's old home.

12 "Balder built himself
a hall, and it is called
Breithablik.
That's a place
where I know
you'll find little grief.

13 "Heimdall inhabits
the eighth hall, Himinbjorg,
that is where he is the master.
In that pleasant house,
the watchman of the gods
happily drinks his good mead.

14 "Freyja rules
in the ninth land, Folkvang—
that is where she arranges the seats.
She chooses half the dead
who die in battle,
and Odin takes the other half.

15 "The tenth hall
is Glitnir, with gold walls
and a silver roof.
The god named Forseti
is there on most days,
and he settles disputes.

16 "The eleventh hall
is Njorth's, which he built
and named Noatun.
That flawless
lord of men
rules that high-timbered temple.

17 "The wide land
of Vithar is overgrown
with high grass and weeds.
That bold son of Odin
is preparing himself
to avenge his father on horseback.

18 "Andhrimnir the cook
lets the pork from Saehrimnir
cook in the cauldron Eldhrimnir.
There is no better meat,
and there are few who know
what the Einherjar eat.

19 "Battle-winning Odin
feeds his tamed wolves,
Geri and Freki.
But for his part,
weapon-loving Odin
lives on wine alone.

20 "Thought and Memory,
my ravens, fly every day
the whole world over.
Each day I fear
that Thought might not return,
but I fear more for Memory."

21 "The waves thunder,
and the Midgard-serpent
makes his home in Fenrir's sea.
Dead men will find
that sea passage
too wide to wade.

22 "Valgrind
is a holy hall
with holy doors, upon a field.
The gate is old,
and there are few
who know how it is locked.

23 "Thor's hall, Bilskirnir,
has six-hundred and forty rooms,
if all are counted.
I am certain
that of all roofed houses,
Thor's is the largest.

24 "I think Valhalla
has six-hundred and forty doors,
if all are counted.
Eight hundred Einherjar
will walk through each,
when the day comes to fight Fafnir.

25 "There is a goat named Heithrun
who stands on Odin's hall
and gnaws the limbs of the tree Laerath.
That goat fills Valhalla's cups
with bright mead from her udders,
and that drink will never diminish.

26 "There is a stag named Eikthyrnir
who stands on Odin's hall
and gnaws the limbs of the tree Laerath.
Drops fall from his horns
into the well of Hvergelmir;
that is the origin of all the rivers:

27 "The rivers Sith and Vith,
Saekin and Eikin,
Svol and Gunnthro,
Fjorm and Fimbulthul,
Rhine and Rennandi,
Gipul and Gopul,

Gomul and Geirvomul,
Thyn and Vin,
Tholl and Holl—
these conceal the gods' riches.

28 "Another river is Vina,
another Vegsvinn,
a third is Thjothnuma,
and also Nyt and Not,
Nonn and Hronn,
Slith and Hrith,
Sylg and Ylg,
Vith and Von,
Vond and Strond,
Gjoll and Leipt—
these rivers flow near the men
who die and go to Hel.

29 "Thor will wade
four rivers every day—
the ones called Kormt and Ormt,
and the two rivers Kerlaug—
when he goes to meetings
at the tree Yggdrasil.
Bifrost, bridge of the gods,
burns in bright flame,
and the holy waters seethe.

30 "The rivers Glath and Gyllir,
Gler and Skeithbrimir,
Silfrintopp and Sinir,
Gisl and Falhofnir,
Gulltopp and Lettfeti,
the gods of Asgard ride
their horses every day
over these when they go
to meet at the tree Yggdrasil.

31 "Beneath the tree Yggdrasil
are three roots, which grow
in three directions.
Hel is beneath one,

Jotunheim beneath another,
Midgard is beneath the third.

32 "A squirrel is named Ratatosk,
he runs along
the trunk of Yggdrasil.
He takes the words
of the eagle, tells his insults
to Nithhogg below.

33 "There are four deer
who stretch out their necks
and eat the leaves of Yggdrasil:
Dain and Dvalin,
Duneyr and Durathror.

34 "No fool
has ever guessed how many
serpents lie beneath Yggdrasil.
I think that
Goin and Moin,
Grabak and Grafvolluth,
Ofnir and Svafnir,
sons of the snake Grafvitnir,
will always gnaw that tree's roots.

35 "The tree Yggdrasil
endures more pain
than any men guess.
It's eaten from above by the deer,
on the side by rot,
from beneath by serpents.

36 "They bring my horn,
my Valkyries! Hrist and Mist,
Skeggjold and Skogul,
Hild and Thruth,
Hlokk and Herfjot,
Goll and Geirolul,
Randgrith, Rathgrith,
and Reginleif—
they bring the Einherjar beer.

37 “Those slender horses,
Arvak and Alsvith,
lead the sun across the sky.
And the gods have hidden
cooling bellows
beneath their legs.

38 “There is a shield named Svol.
It is set between Midgard and the sun,
in front of the shining sun.
I know the mountains and the sea
would burn up entirely
if that shield ever fell down from there.

39 “Skol is the name of the wolf
who chases the sun
till it sets at evening in the woods.
Another wolf named Hati
is Hrothvitnir’s son; he runs
in front of the sun, behind the moon.

40 “The earth was formed
from Ymir’s flesh,
and the sea from his blood,
the rocks from his bones,
the trees from his hair,
and the sky from his skull.

41 “The happy gods
formed Midgard for humans
from Ymir’s eyelashes.
They formed
all the grim clouds
from his brains.

42 “Whoever first puts out the fire
will have the help of Ull
and all the gods.
The realms will be open
to all the gods,
when the kettles are cooled.

43 “In ancient days
the dwarves made
Skithblathnir,
the best of ships,
for handsome Frey,
the strong son of Njorth.

44 “The tree Yggdrasil
is the best of trees.
Skithblathnir is the best ship,
Odin the best god,
Sleipnir the best horse,
Bifrost the best bridge,
Bragi the best poet,
Habrok the best hawk,
Garm the best dog.

45 “I have shown my face
in the presence of gods,
now help is on its way.
It will come
to all the gods
on Aegir’s benches,
when they drink at Aegir’s place.

46 “I have called myself Grim,
I have called myself Wanderer,
Warrior and Helmet-Wearer,
Famed One and Third One,
Thunder and Wave,
Hel-Blind and One-Eye,

47 “Truth, and Swift,
and True Father,
Battle-Merry, Battle-Stirrer,
Curse-Eye and Fire-Eye,
Evildoer, Spellcaster,
Masked and Shadowed-Face,
Fool and Wise Man,

48 "Long-Hat and Long-Beard,
Victory-Father and War-Ready,
Allfather, War-Father,
Rope-Rider and Hanged-God.
I have never been known
by just one name
since I first walked among men.

49 "They called me Shadowed-Face
here at Geirroth's place,
but Gelding at Asmund's,
they called me Driver
when I pulled the sleds,
and Mighty at the assembly.
Among the gods I'm called Wish-Granter,
Speaker, Just-as-High, Shield-Shaker,
Wand-Bearer, Graybeard.

50 "Wise and Wisdom-Granter
were my names at Sokkmimir's hall,
when I deceived that old giant
and I killed
his famous son.
I was his killer.

51 "You are drunk, Geirroth!
You have drunk too much.
You have lost too much
when you have lost my favor;
you've lost the favor of Odin
and all the Einherjar.

52 "I've told you much,
and you'll remember little—
your friends will deceive you—
I see the sword
of my friend
dripping with blood.

53 "Now Odin
will have a weapon-killed man—
I know *your* life has ended.
Your guardian spirits are anxious,
they see Odin here before you.
Approach me, if you can.

54 "Odin is my name.
But before they called me Terror,
and Thunder before that,
and Waker and Killer,
and Confuser and Orator-God,
Heat-Maker, Sleep-Maker,
both Gelding and Father!
I think all these names were used
for me alone."

King Geirroth sat with his sword on his knees, halfway drawn. When he understood that this was Odin who had come to his hall, he stood up and wanted to take Odin out of the flames. But the sword fell out of his hand and fell hilt-first to the ground. The king tripped and fell upon it, so that the sword pierced him through and he died. Then Odin left, and Agnar was the king of that land for a long time afterward.

For Skirnis (The Journey of Skirnir on Behalf of Frey)

The next poem, *For Skirnis* (literally "Skirnir's Journey"), is also preserved in part in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to, where it is called *Skirnismal* ("Skirnir's Words"). Read literally, the poem presents an unlovely picture of the god of agriculture, Frey, who sees a beautiful giant woman named Gerth, daughter of Gymir, when he is sitting upon Odin's throne, Hlithskjalf. Beauty and bright light are stereotypically associated in Old Norse, hence the description of Gerth as literally luminous in stanza 6. Frey sends his messenger Skirnir to convince Gerth to marry him at any cost, and his efforts make up the bulk of the poem. After many threats and curses, Gerth agrees to marry Frey, but she stipulates that Frey must wait nine nights' time. Skirnir returns to Frey and tells him that he must wait *nine* nights, which prompts Frey to close the poem by complaining that he must wait *three* nights. This difference in numbering is perhaps the reflection of an old custom compelling men to wait for a *hynott* (literally, "marriage-night"), which lasted three days, before they could consummate an agreed marriage. The poem's narrative has been interpreted as an allegory, in which Frey as the god of agriculture sends "the shining one" (which is the literal meaning of *Skirnir,* perhaps intended to evoke the sun) to prepare the thawing earth (symbolized by *Gerth*, whose name may be related to the word for "farm") for the first sowing at the end of winter. As usual, the prose introduction and insertions are part of how the poem was preserved in the manuscript.

For Skirnis

Frey, son of Njorth, sat on Hlithskjalf and looked out over all the worlds. He looked into Jotunheim, and there he saw a beautiful woman who walked from her father's house to her own little detached house nearby. He became lovesick from the sight.

Frey had a servant who was named Skirnir, and Njorth told Skirnir to ask Frey what the matter was. Then Skathi said:

1 "Get up, Skirnir,
and go ask
our son to talk.
Find out

who it is
who's made him so angry."

Skirnir said:

2 "I can expect
only bad words from your son
if I go and talk with him,
if I go to ask him
who it is
who's made him so angry."

Skirnir said:

3 "Tell me, Frey,
great among the gods,
because I want to know—
why are you sitting alone
inside the hall
all day long, my lord?"

Frey said:

4 "Why should I tell you
my sorrow,
young man?
The sun shines
all day long,
but it does not soothe my longing."

Skirnir said:

5 "Lord, I doubt that
your longings are so great
that you cannot tell me about them.
The two of us were young
together a long time ago;
we can trust each other."

Frey said:

6 "In Gymir's yard
I saw
a beautiful woman walking.
Her arms shone so bright,
they reflected
in all the air and sea.

7 "That woman means more
to me than any woman
has ever meant to any young man.
But among the gods and elves,
there is no one
who would bless our marriage."

Skirnir said:

8 "Give me a horse
that will carry me
through darkness and flame.
And give me your sword
that fights by itself
against enemy giants."

Frey said:

9 "I'll give you a horse
that will carry you
through darkness and flame.
And I'll give you my sword
that fights by itself
(if it is carried by a wise man)."

Skirnir said to the horse:

10 "It is dark outside,
time for us two to ride
over dewy mountains,
to rush beyond the homes of men.
Either we both will come back,
or the mighty giant
will take us both."

Skirnir rode to Gymir's home in Jotunheim. There were fierce dogs chained up outside the fence that surrounded the hall where Gerth lived. Skirnir rode over to where a herder sat on a mound and said to him:

11 "Tell me, herdsman,
sitting on that mound
and watching all the roads,
how can I get past Gymir's dogs
for a chance to talk
with the young lady Gerth?"

The herdsman answered:

12 "Is this your death day,
or are you already dead?
You'll never have a chance
for a conversation
with Gymir's good daughter."

Skirnir said:

13 "There's always a better choice
than cowardice, if you
have business to take care of.
One day long ago
my life was already shaped,
and my fate was fixed."

Gerth said:

14 "What is this noise
I'm hearing
in our halls?
The earth trembles
and everything shakes
in the home of Gymir."

A serving-girl said:

15 "There is a man outside.
He has stepped off his horse,
and he's letting it feed."

Gerth said:

16 "Ask him to come inside,
into our hall,
and drink the splendid mead,
though I fear
that he may be
the one who killed my brother.

17 "Are you of the Aesir,
or the wise Vanir,
or one of the elves, guest?
Why have you come
over the great flame
to see our home?"

Skirnir said:

18 "I am no elf,
nor one of the Aesir,
nor one of the Vanir.
Though I have come
over the great flame
to see your home.

19 "I have eleven apples,
made all of gold—
I will give them to you, Gerth,
to buy your love,
so that you will pledge
to live happily with Frey."

Gerth said:

20 "I would never accept
eleven apples
as the price of my love for any man,
not even for Frey.
I will never marry him
so long as we live."

Skirnir said:

21 "I will give you
the ring that Odin placed
on his young son's funeral pyre.
Eight just like it
drop from it
every ninth night."

Gerth said:

22 "I would never accept
that ring, even if Odin did place it
on his young son's funeral pyre.
I have no lack of gold
in the home of Gymir,
to share with my father."

Skirnir said:

23 "Do you see this sword, girl,
this slender, pretty sword,
which I have in my hand here?
I will cut off your head
from your neck
unless you go along with me."

Gerth said:

24 "I will never
endure the threats
of any man.
And I think
if Gymir finds you
here, you brave men
will come to blows."

Skirnir said:

25 "Do you see this sword, girl,
this slender, pretty sword,
which I have in my hand here?
Your old father will bend his knees
beneath this blade;
I'll be the death of your father.

26 "I will beat you with a club
till I tame you, girl,
till you go along with my wishes.
Then you'll go to a place
where no one will ever
see you again.

27 "You will sit forever
on an eagle's nest,
turned away from the world,
looking in at Hel.
Food will seem as awful to you
as the Midgard-serpent
seems to men.

28 "You will be laughed at
when you emerge;
a giant man will look at you.
They'll all stare at you.
You'll be better-known
than Heimdall himself,
staring out behind your gate.

29 "Foolishness and screaming!
And pain, unendurable pain!
May your tears grow with your sorrow!
Sit down, and I
will tell you some sad news,
I'll double your grief:

30 "Monsters will bend you over
for the whole unhappy day
in Jotunheim.
You'll crawl every day,
without choice,
without hope,
to a hall of frost-trolls.
You'll weep
and never be happy,
your sorrows will make you cry.

31 "You'll have a three-headed giant
for your husband,
or go without a husband.
You'll go crazy
and rot with illness.
You'll be like a fat thistle
ripped halfway off its stalk
and left to dry.

32 "I went to a forest,
to get a young tree branch,
to find a magic wand there;
I found a magic wand there.

33 "Odin will rage at you,
Thor will rage at you,
Frey will hate you,
you evil girl!
You have earned
the hatred of the gods.

34 "Hear me, giants!
Hear me, frost-trolls!
Hear me, fire-trolls,
hear me, gods!
I curse this girl,
I curse her
never to know a man's love,
never to have a husband!

35 "Hrimgrimnir's the name of the troll
who will take you
down below the gates of Hel.
There, below the tree roots,
servants will bring you
goats' urine to drink.
You'll never get
anything better to drink,
not if you want it, girl.
Not even if I want it, girl.

36 "I curse you with that troll,
and three other curses—
sexual shame, and madness,
and unbearable suffering.
I've cursed you already,
but I'll call off the curses,
if you give me good reason."

Gerth said:

37 "Be welcome here, instead,
and take this drinking-horn
full of good ancient mead.
Even if I previously said
that I would never
marry that god of the Vanir."

Skirnir said:

38 "I want to know
my errand's complete
before I ride away.
Tell me when you'll meet
the noble son of Njorth—
when will you come to comfort Frey?"

Gerth said:

39 "There's a grove named Barri—
we both know it—
a peaceful place in the forest.
After nine nights
Frey, son of Njorth,
will enjoy my love there."

Then Skirnir rode home. Frey stood waiting for him and asked for the news:

40 "Tell me, Skirnir,
before you unsaddle that horse,
before you take one more step:
What did you accomplish
in Jotunheim
for your or my purposes?"

Skirnir said:

41 "There's a grove named Barri—
we both know it—
a peaceful place in the forest.
After nine nights
Frey, son of Njorth,
will enjoy Gerth's love there."

Frey said:

42 "One night would be long enough,
two would be worse—
how can I contain my lust for three?
A month has often
seemed shorter to me
than half such a marriage-night."

Harbarthsljoth (The Taunting of Thor by Odin)

Harbarthsljoth (literally "Graybeard's Song") is a relatively long poem in which Odin, in the disguise of the ferryman "Graybeard," denies Thor passage on his ferry. The two exchange heated words that clearly compare and contrast the two gods' deeds, attitudes, and reputations, often ending their respective boasts with the question, *Hvat vanntu methan?* ("What were you doing meanwhile?"). By stanza 24 Graybeard has more or less admitted he is Odin, and Thor seems to understand his true identity as well, though he never addresses Graybeard as Odin. In stanza 26 there is a reference to Thor's journey to meet Utgartha-Loki, told in the Prose Edda, in which Thor and his companions sleep inside the glove of a truly huge giant. *Harbarthsljoth* appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to. The prose introduction is original.

Harbarthsljoth

Thor was coming back from the east and came to a fjord. On the other side of the fjord was a ferryman with his boat. Thor called out:

1 "WHO IS THAT MAN WHO STANDS
on the other side of the fjord?"

The other man answered:

2 "Who is that man who calls
from across the water?"

Thor said:

3 "Take me across the water,
and I'll give you some breakfast.
I'm carrying a basket on my back,
and you'll find no better food.
I ate in peace
before I left home;
I had some herring and goat,
and I'm still full from that."

The ferryman said:

4 "You're boasting
about your breakfast.
But you don't know
if your homecoming will be glad;
I think your mother is dead."

Thor said:

5 "You are telling me
news that would
seem bad to anybody—
that my mother is dead."

The ferryman said:

6 "You don't look like a man
who owns good farms.
There you stand,
barefoot like a beggar,
not even a good pair of pants on."

Thor said:

7 "Row that boat over here,
I'll show you the landing.
Who owns that ship
that you're on?"

The ferryman said:

8 "A man named Hildolf
asked me to run the ferry,
a wise and provident man
who lives in Rathseyjarsund.
He asked me not to give rides
to beggars or horse thieves,
only good people
and those I know well.
Tell me your name
if you want to cross the fjord."

Thor said:

9 "I'll tell you my name,
I'm no criminal,
and I'm from a good family:
I am Odin's son,
Meili's brother,
and Magni's father,
warrior of the gods,
you're talking to Thor here!
Now I'll ask in turn,
what is your name?"

The ferryman said:

10 "Graybeard is my name,
I rarely lie about that."

Thor said:

11 "Why would anyone lie about that,
except to conceal some crime?"

Graybeard said:

12 "Whether or not I committed crimes,
I'd still want to defend my life
against people like you,
unless my fated day had come."

Thor said:

13 "It seems like a shame
for me to wade over there
to get at you
and get my pants wet.
But I'll pay you back,
slanderer,
for these nasty words,
if I get over this fjord."

Graybeard said:

14 "I'll stand right here
and wait for you.
I think I'll be your toughest enemy
since Hrungnir."

Thor said:

15 "You want to talk about
when I killed Hrungnir,
that arrogant giant
with a stone head?
I knocked him down,
I laid him out flat.
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

16 "I was with Fjolvar
for five years
on the island
called Algron.
We were waging war,
killing warriors,
proving ourselves,
and sampling the local ladies."

Thor said:

17 "How did the women treat you?"

Graybeard said:

18 "We had girls who liked to kick,
but sometimes they would act docile.
We had wise women, too;
and sometimes they were loyal.
Some of them wound
some thread from a valley,
out of the sand.
I made them all
submit to my will.
I slept with seven sisters,
had all their charms to myself.
What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

19 "I killed Thjassi,
the bold giant;
I threw the eyes
of that son of Allvaldi

into the clear sky.
Those are the greatest
monuments to my deeds,
which everyone can see ever since.
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

20 "Great seductions.
In the night I was ridden by women
stolen from their husbands.
I think Hlebarth
was a strong giant;
he gave me a magic wand,
and I enchanted away his wits."

Thor said:

21 "You repaid him badly
for his good gift."

Graybeard said:

22 "A tree has only the space
it can crowd another out of;
every man must look out for himself.
What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

23 "I was in the east
fighting giants,
evil women
who lived in the mountains.
There would be many more giants
if they had all survived;
there would not be a single human
left on Midgard.
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

24 "I was in the south
making battles.
I turned princes against one another,
I never made peace.

Odin receives the powerful men
who fall in battle,
and Thor receives their servants."

Thor said:

25 "You deal out victory
and defeat unfairly,
if you have so much power over battles."

Graybeard said:

26 "You have plenty of strength,
Thor, but no courage.
Like a prince of cowards,
you got stepped on in a glove—
you didn't look much like Thor then.
You didn't dare
sneeze or break wind,
for fear that
the giant Fjalar might hear you."

Thor said:

27 "Graybeard, you sissy!
I'll kill you
if I get across this fjord!"

Graybeard said:

28 "How are you going to get across?
You have no transportation.
What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

29 "I was in the east
guarding a river,
when Svarang's sons
attacked me.
They threw stones at me,
but they got little out of it,
they ended up
begging me for peace.
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

30 "I was in the east,
together with a certain lovely someone.
I enjoyed myself with that beauty
for quite a while—
I showed the blonde a good time,
and she showed me one."

Thor said:

31 "You had a good-looking woman there?"

Graybeard said:

32 "I could have used your help, Thor—
you could have helped me
hold that gorgeous girl down."

Thor said:

33 "I would have helped you,
if I had been there."

Graybeard said:

34 "I would trust you about that,
if you hadn't tricked me before."

Thor said:

35 "I'm no heel-biter,
no cheap old shoe in the springtime."

Graybeard said:

36 "What were you doing meanwhile, Thor?"

Thor said:

37 "Fighting berserkers' brides
on the island Hlesey.
They had done evil things,
assaulted everyone."

Graybeard said:

38 "How shameful of you, Thor,
fighting women."

Thor said:

39 "They were wolves,
hardly women.
They broke my ship
when I landed ashore,
threatened me
with iron rods,
and chased my servant Thjalfi.
What were you doing meanwhile, Graybeard?"

Graybeard said:

40 "I was with an army.
We came this way
to wave some war-banners
and get some spears bloody."

Thor said:

41 "Now you're saying
you came to do the gods evil?"

Graybeard said:

42 "I'll give you this arm-ring
to make up for it.
Fair judges would say
it's an equal value."

Thor said:

43 "Where did you learn
to spit out all these hateful words?
I know I've never heard
more awful talk."

Graybeard said:

44 "I learned this sort of talk
from the old men who live
in the forests of home."

Thor said:

45 "You give a good name to burial mounds
if you call them 'the forests of home.'"

Graybeard said:

46 "That's how I talk about such things."

Thor said:

47 "I'll repay you for this slander
with a good beating,
if I can get across this fjord.
I think you'd howl
louder than a wolf
if you felt my hammer on you."

Graybeard said:

48 "Your wife has a lover, Thor.
You'll meet him if you go home,
then you'll really suffer!
That one's a better target for your hammer."

Thor said:

49 "You are just lying at random,
saying whatever will most anger me.
You cowardly fool,
I think you're lying."

Graybeard said:

50 "I think I'm telling the truth.
But you're late completing your journey—
you won't get home for a long time,
even if you walk all day and night."

Thor said:

51 "Graybeard, you sissy,
you're the one who's held me up."

Graybeard said:

52 "I didn't think that Thor
would let some peasant
hold him up on his journey."

Thor said:

53 "Here's some advice:
Row that boat over here to me,

we'll stop this bickering,
and you'll meet me face to face."

Graybeard said:

54 "Get far away from here.
You don't get to ride the ferry."

Thor said:

55 "Then show me the way around,
if you won't take me across."

Graybeard said:

56 "I won't deny that request.
It's a long walk:
Go to the tree trunk,
then to the rock,
then turn left
till you reach Midgard.
There your mother the Earth
will meet you,
and she'll show you
the gods' road to Asgard."

Thor said:

57 "Can I get there today?"

Graybeard said:

58 "I suspect,
if you travel hard,
you could be there before sundown."

Thor said:

59 "I see this conversation is over,
since you only answer with insults.
I will pay you back for this delay
if we ever meet again."

Graybeard said:

60 "Go now, and have a bad journey!"

Hymiskvitha (The Fetching of the Cauldron)

Hymiskvitha (literally "Hymir's Poem") tells the tale of Thor and Tyr retrieving a cauldron large enough to brew beer for all the gods; the gods lack such a cauldron, but Tyr's father, a giant named Hymir, owns one. This poem also relates the story of Thor fishing for the Midgard-serpent with the head of an ox for bait, a scene that was commonly depicted in art in the Viking period.

Hymiskvitha appears in both the *Codex Regius* and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to.

Hymiskvitha

1

A LONG TIME AGO
the gods came back from hunting,
but they started feeling thirsty
before they were done eating.
They waved their wands,
looked for omens in blood,
they learned that Aegir
owned some cauldrons.

2

Aegir, giant from the stones,
sat there, happy as a child;
he looked much like
Miskorblindi's son.
Thor, son of Odin,
stared fiercely into his eyes:
"You will often provide
a feast for the gods."

3

The argumentative god
frustrated Aegir;
the giant immediately sought
some revenge against the gods.
He asked Thor
to fetch him a cauldron—

"I promise to brew beer
in it for all of you."

4 The gods did not
know how to proceed;
none of them
could get a cauldron.
But Tyr, in private,
spoke to Thor
alone, and revealed
a welcome secret:

5 "My mighty father,
Hymir the wise,
lives to the east of Elivagar,
near the end of the sky.
He owns a cauldron
that's a mile deep;
it's the biggest
cauldron of all."

Thor said:

6 "Do you know if we
can borrow this cauldron?"

Tyr said:

"Yes, friend, if we
can play a few tricks."

7 They left swiftly
and traveled the whole day
from Asgard,
till they came to Egil's house.
They left Thor's big-horned
goats in his care,
and then they went
to where Hymir lived.

8 Tyr found his
ugly grandmother,
she had
nine hundred heads.

But another woman
was there, all golden,
with a pretty face,
and gave her son a beer:

9 "Son of giants!"
she said. "I'll hide
you courageous men
beneath the cauldron;
my husband
will abuse any guests
who come to our home."

10 That angry,
hard-minded man
came home late
from his fishing,
came into his hall—
glaciers shook at each step—
the beard on his face
was frozen.

Hymir's concubine, Tyr's mother, said:

11 "Hail, Hymir,
come in and be happy!
Your son has come
to your home,
as we expected
after his long absence.
And our famous enemy,
the friend of humans,
Thor, son of Odin,
follows him.

12 "You see them sitting
beneath your own hall's roof,
they're hiding
by that wall."
The giant reached out
and broke the wall,
and snapped
a beam in half.

13 Eight cauldrons
shattered, except
a well-forged one
which fell in one piece.
Thor and Tyr came forward;
the old giant
bent his gaze
upon his enemy.

14 His thoughts were not kind
when he fixed his eyes
on Thor, killer of giants,
here, in his own home.
But the giant
ordered three bulls killed—
reluctantly,
he ordered them cooked.

15 They beheaded
the bulls,
and brought them
to the cook-pot;
and before he went to bed,
Thor, son of Odin,
ate two whole bulls
of Hymir's.

16 Gray-haired old Hymir
saw it would be costly
to feed the hunger
of Thor.
"If all three of us
want to eat tomorrow,
then we'd better
go fishing."

17 Thor said
he was willing to row and fish,
if the bold giant
would let him have some bait.

Hymir said:

"Well, giant-killer,
if you're brave enough,
go out to my herd.
You'll find some bait there.

18 "I suspect
you'll find it easy
to take some bait
from one of my oxen."
So Thor went quickly
out in the forest,
and he saw before him
a black ox.

19 Thor broke
the whole head
off the ox,
gripping its horns.

Hymir said:

"What you've done
here is even worse
than it was having you inside,
sitting and eating."

20 Then Thor
asked the giant
to come with him to sea,
to row out with him.
But Hymir
rowed a little,
and was unwilling
to row any further
out in the deep sea.

21 Famous Hymir
caught a whale,
and then caught two whales
on one hook,
but Odin's son

sat in the rear
and craftily
baited his own hook.

22 Thor,
friend of humans,
enemy of the serpent,
put the ox's head on his hook.
Then the gaping Midgard-serpent
came up, the one
that hates the gods
and lives in the encircling sea.

23 The bold Thor
pulled bravely
to bring that poison-slick
serpent up on board.
With his hammer,
he struck a blow
on the head of
Fenrir's serpent brother.

24 The monster howled,
volcanoes erupted,
and the old earth
trembled all over,
but that sea monster
sank back into the waves.

25 The giant was gloomy
as they rowed home;
he sat at the oars
and said not a word
as they steered the boat
back toward land.

Hymir said:

26 "Share my work
with me, do your half—
either take the whales
to my house,

or stay and
tie up the boat."

27 Thor went and
grabbed up the boat and oars—
he didn't bail out the water,
he just lifted the whole thing—
and he took the whole boat,
with its oars and buckets
(it was a good boat)
to the home of the giant.
Thor carried it
through the forest.

28 But the giant
was still angry,
he demanded
a test of strength from Thor:
He said it was no test at all
to row a boat,
but a truly strong man
would be able to break his cup.

29 So Thor
took the cup in hand,
but he broke a stone
trying to shatter that glass cup.
Then he threw it
through a wall,
but it was brought back
unbroken to Hymir.

30 Till Hymir's
pretty concubine
told Thor a
useful secret:
"Hit it on Hymir's head!
That giant's skull
is made of harder stuff
than any cup!"

31 Thor stood up
vigorously,
he summoned
all his godly strength;
he left not a mark
on that giant's head,
but the wine cup
broke into pieces.

32 Hymir said,
"I know my loss is great,
when I see my cup
fall broken at my knees;
I know that I will
never say again,
'The drinks are ready!'

33 "The cauldron is yours,
Thor and Tyr,
if you can carry it
out of my house!"
Tyr tried twice
to lift it,
but the cauldron
remained unmoved.

34 Thor, strong father
of Mothi, took a turn.
His feet broke through the floor
while he lifted,
but he lifted that cauldron
over his head,
and the chains that held it
broke, and rattled at his heels.

35 They walked a long time
before Thor, son of Odin,
turned around
to take a look behind him,
and he saw, coming from
the rocky east, Hymir, with

an army of giants coming at him,
some with more than one head.

36 Thor threw the cauldron
down from his shoulders
and stood, ready to fight.
He threw Mjollnir,
his killing hammer,
and he killed
all those
lava giants.

37 They didn't walk long
before Thor, son of Odin,
saw before him
one of his goats, half-dead.
The goat was walking
with a lame leg,
and this was caused
by lie-telling Loki.

38 But audience,
you have heard all this,
this story is often
told among the stories of the gods.
It's told how Thor
was paid back
by the lava giant Egil;
Thor took both his children.

39 Then Thor,
mightiest of gods,
returned to Asgard
with the cauldron of Hymir.
And now the gods
drink good beer
every winter's day
in Aegir's hall.

Lokasenna (Loki's Taunts)

In *Lokasenna*, a clear picture of the trickster figure Loki appears. Having been cast out of a feast of the gods for killing a servant, Loki returns to the feast and offers insults to each god and goddess in turn. He is tolerated because Odin has made an oath never to drink without Loki present (st. 9). Loki's insults are sometimes phrased in surprisingly explicit scatological terms (as in st. 32 and 34), and his insults toward the goddesses are invariably of a sexual nature, as are the insults that he and Odin trade with one another. Note that many stanzas, especially Loki's, begin with "You know . . ." (Old Norse *Veiztu* . . .); this is a fairly common opening to stanzas elsewhere in the Edda as well, but here it may also be intended ironically, since much of what Loki reveals of the gods' indecency was probably concealed from the other gods prior to this disclosure. Finally, after Loki has slandered everyone present, Thor appears and threatens Loki into leaving, and we learn at last how Loki was punished for insulting the gods by being chained beneath a poisonous snake, dripping venom on his face. The prose sections are original to the manuscript.

Lokasenna

Aegir, also called Gymir, prepared ale for the gods after he had acquired the great kettle, which has been told of. Odin came to the feasting with Frigg, his wife. Thor did not come, since he was out east, but Thor's wife Sif was there. Bragi came with his wife Ithunn. Tyr was there as well—he was one-handed, because Fenrir had bitten his hand off when he was chained. Njorth was there with his wife Skathi, and his children Frey and Freyja. Vithar, son of Odin, was there. Loki was there, and so were Frey's servants, Byggvir and Beyla. There were many other gods and elves as well. Aegir had two servants: Fimafeng and Eldir. Shining gold lit the hall, and the beer served itself. It was a great place of peace, and everyone praised how good Aegir's servants were. Loki could not tolerate hearing good things said about servants, and so he killed Fimafeng. Then the Aesir shook their shields at Loki and shouted at him, and drove him out into the forest, and went back

to drinking. But Loki came back, and in the darkness outside he met Eldir. Loki said:

1 "Tell me, Eldir,
before you take
another step forward:
What are the gods
sitting in there
talking about, over their beer?"

Eldir said:

2 "They are comparing
their weapons,
and judging their readiness for war.
Of the elves and gods
sitting inside,
not one is your friend."

Loki said:

3 "I will go in
to Aegir's hall
and see this feast.
I will bring them
slanders and rumors,
and mix their mead with misery."

Eldir said:

4 "You know that if
you go in to Aegir's hall
to visit this feast,
bringing slanders and rumors
to spill out on their floor,
they will wipe those words right off on you."

Loki said:

5 "You know, Eldir,
if you and I were to compete
at exchanging insults,
it would be
lucky for me
if you said too much."

Then Loki went into the hall. And when the feasters saw who had come in, they went silent.

Loki said:

6 "I come thirsty
into this hall,
I, Loki, after a long road,
to ask the gods
to offer me
just one drink of their famous mead.

7 "Why are you so silent,
you proud gods,
why do you say nothing?
You ought to show me to my seat
at such a feast,
or else order me to leave."

Bragi said:

8 "The gods will never
show you to a seat
at this feast.
The gods know what company
they want to share
a happy evening's drinking with."

Loki said:

9 "Do you remember, Odin,
when in bygone days
we blended our blood?
You told me then
that you would never taste a drink
that was not served to us both."

Odin said:

10 "Get up, Vithar,
let this father of wolves
take a seat and have a drink.
Let's not let Loki
slander us here
in Aegir's hall."

Then Vithar stood up and served Loki a drink. Before he drank, Loki said:

11 "Hail, gods and goddesses,
all the high and holy Aesir!
Except for
that one god
who sits furthest down the bench,
that one there—Bragi."

Bragi said:

12 "I will give you
a horse and a sword,
I offer you these freely, and a ring—
but in exchange,
please don't slander
the gods, don't awake their anger."

Loki said:

13 "Since when have *you*
had a treasure or a horse to give?
Of all the gods
and elves
inside this hall,
you're the biggest coward!"

Bragi said:

14 "If we were outside,
and you had not come
inside Aegir's hall,
I would be holding your severed head.
I'd pay you back that way
for all your lies."

Loki said:

15 "You're brave while you're sitting.
But you wouldn't do that,
Bragi, you benchwarmer.
Go ahead and strike me,
if you're so angry.
A brave man wouldn't be afraid to do it."

Ithunn said:

16 "I beg you, Bragi,
think of your children
by blood and by adoption,
and don't slander
even Loki
here in Aegir's hall."

Loki said:

17 "Silence, Ithunn.
I don't think there's any woman
more lustful than you.
Not since you wrapped
your pretty arms
around the killer of your brother."

Ithunn said:

18 "I will not slander
even Loki
here in Aegir's hall.
I will calm you,
beer-maddened Bragi;
I don't want you two to fight."

Gefjun said:

19 "Why should two gods
exchange insulting words
here inside this hall?
I think Loki
is a cheerful fellow;
everybody loves him."

Loki said:

20 "Silence, Gefjun.
I remember that boy
who seduced you into his bed.
That handsome boy
gave you a necklace,
and you opened your thighs for him."

Odin said:

21 "You're mad, Loki,
out of your wits,
if you want to make Gefjun angry.
I think she foresees the fates
of all living things
as well as I do."

Loki said:

22 "Silence, Odin.
You always judge battles
unfairly for humans.
You have often given
defeat to the better side,
when you shouldn't have."

Odin said:

23 "You know,
even if I did judge unfairly,
and made the better side lose,
I know that *you*,
for eight years,
lived on the earth down below
as a cow in milk, and as a woman,
and you've given birth to children—
I call that a pervert's way of living."

Loki said:

24 "But people say that you
practiced womanly magic
on Samsey, dressed as a woman.
You lived as a witch
among the humans—
and I call *that* a pervert's way of living."

Frigg said:

25 "You should not
discuss your histories
openly in front of everyone.
Whatever you two gods
went about doing in your younger days—
that belongs in the past, and should stay there."

Loki said:

26 "Silence, Frigg.
You're Fjorgyn's girl,
and you've always been lustful—
think of when you, Odin's wife,
accepted both Vilir and Ve
into your embrace."

Frigg said:

27 "You know, if I had a son
like Balder, sitting here
with me in Aegir's hall,
in the presence of these gods,
I declare you would never come out
alive, you'd be killed shortly."

Loki said:

28 "You must want me
to recount even more
of my mischief, Frigg.
After all, I'm the one
who made it so that Balder
will never ride home again."

Freyja said:

29 "You are mad, Loki,
when you boast
of your sins.
I believe that Frigg
knows everyone's fate,
even if she never speaks of it."

Loki said:

30 "Silence, Freyja.
You are not free from faults;
I know you too well.
You've played the whore
with every god and every elf
who sits in this hall."

Freyja said:

31 "You speak lies,
and soon this kind of talk
will cause you real trouble.
The gods are angry at you
and all the goddesses, too—
you will go home friendless."

Loki said:

32 "Silence, Freyja.
You are a witch,
and have dealt out many curses.
I hear the gods found you
lying with your brother,
and that you farted then, Freyja."

Njorth said:

33 "It is a small matter
whether women sleep
with their own men or others'.
But it's a surprise to hear
such a sissy god talking here,
when he's borne children."

Loki said:

34 "Silence, Njorth.
You were sent from the west
as a hostage for the gods.
The daughters of Hymir
used your mouth as a urinal,
and you've tasted plenty of piss."

Njorth said:

35 "I had some good from that,
when I was sent from the west
as a hostage for the gods.
I fathered a son
beloved by all,
considered a hero among gods."

Loki said:

36 "Stop this now, Njorth,
control yourself.
I will not conceal this any longer:
I know that you fathered that son,
Frey, with your own sister,
and I expect you've done even worse."

Tyr said:

37 "Frey is the best
of all the gods
in the holy halls of Asgard.
He doesn't make girls weep
nor cause trouble for women;
he frees captives from their chains."

Loki said:

38 "Silence, Tyr.
You don't know how to
settle disputes between men.
I'm thinking
of your right hand,
which Fenrir, my son, bit off."

Tyr said:

39 "I lost that hand,
you lost that son;
we both suffered loss.
Your son isn't doing well, either;
he remains forever in chains,
waiting for Ragnarok."

Loki said:

40 "Silence, Tyr,
or don't you know your own wife
had a son by me?
You poor fool,
I'll never pay you a penny
in compensation for that."

Frey said:

41 "I see that wolf
sitting and drooling
till Ragnarok comes.
And you'll be the next one
chained up, you evildoer,
if you don't close your mouth."

Loki said:

42 "You had to pay money
to get yourself a bride,
and you gave up your famous sword.
When the giants
ride to Asgard,
you won't be able to fight."

Byggvir said:

43 "If I had a noble family
and a grand hall
like Frey does,
I'd beat this liar
down to his marrow,
break every bone and limb in him."

Loki said:

44 "Who's this little fellow
wagging his tail,
scavenging for master's scraps?
You're always in your master's ear,
always twittering away
while doing your mindless work."

Byggvir said:

45 "I am named Byggvir,
and all the gods and men
say I'm brave.
I'm proud to say
that all the gods
are enjoying their beer here."

Loki said:

46 "Silence, Byggvir.
You don't even know
how to serve food to guests.
And worse than that,
I know that we can find *you*
hiding in the straw when battles start."

Heimdall said:

47 "You're drunk, Loki,
drunk to the point of foolishness.
Why don't you control yourself?
This kind of drunkenness
makes every man
say more than he means to."

Loki said:

48 "Silence, Heimdall.
In the old days
a miserable fate was assigned to you:
You have to stand all the time,
stay watchful all the time,
as the guardian of the gods."

Skathi said:

49 "This is fun for you, Loki,
but you won't be speaking
as a free man much longer.
The gods will
bind you to the rock,
with the cold guts of your own son."

Loki said:

50 "You know, even if the gods
were going to bind me to the rock
with the cold guts of my own son,
I was still first and last
on the battlefield
when we fought your father Thjassi."

Skathi said:

51 "You know, even if you were
first and last on the battlefield
when the gods fought against Thjassi,
you will never be welcome
in any home or other place
where I have power."

Loki said:

52 "You had kinder words for me
when you were begging me
to join you in your bed.
But one expects as much
when one speaks openly
about such hidden shames."

Then Sif came forward and offered Loki a drink of mead and said:

53 "Hail to you now, Loki,
take this drink I offer you
of our good old mead.
Do this, rather than find fault
with me, alone among
all the gods and goddesses."

Loki drained the drink, and said:

54 "You would be unique, Sif,
if you actually were
wary and unwelcoming to other men.
But I alone know
how you were unfaithful
to your husband Thor—
and I was the one you slept with."

Beyla said:

55 "Listen! All the mountains
are shaking, I think
Thor is coming home.
He'll close this mouth
that's slandering
all the gods and men."

Loki said:

56 "Silence, Beyla.
You're Byggvir's wife—
and you have plenty of other faults.
There's no greater beast
among the gods here tonight,
you lowly milkmaid."

Then Thor came and said:

57 "Silence, you sissy,
or I'll let my hammer
silence you instead.
I'll knock your head
off your shoulders,
and then you'll be silent—and dead."

Loki said:

58 "Thor has come to the hall.
But why are you making
such a big show of yourself, Thor?
I don't think you'll look
half so daring at Ragnarok,
when the wolf swallows your father."

Thor said:

59 "Silence, you sissy,
or I'll let my hammer
silence you instead.
I'll throw you out of here
into Jotunheim,
and no one will ever see you again."

Loki said:

60 "You'll probably never
tell any human beings
what you've done in Jotunheim.
I remember when you
sat trembling in a giant's glove;
you didn't look much like Thor then."

Thor said:

61 "Silence, you sissy,
or I'll let my hammer
silence you instead.
With my right hand
I'll beat you,
break every bone in you."

Loki said:

62 "I expect I'll live
a long time still, even if
you threaten me with that hammer.
You thought Utgartha-Loki's
food-bag was challenge enough,
and you left that contest still hungry."

Thor said:

63 "Silence, you sissy,
or I'll let my hammer
silence you instead.
I plan to send you
straight to Hel
beyond the corpse-gates."

Loki said:

64 "I've spoken to the gods,
and the gods' sons,
said everything I dared to say.
But it's because of you, Thor,
that I'll leave. I know *you*,
and you alone, mean your threats.

65 "You made beer,
Aegir, but you'll never again
host a feast here.
Everything you own
will burn up—
and you will feel flames
on your back."

Concerning Loki

After this, Loki hid in the Falls of Frananger in the shape of a salmon, but the gods caught him. He was tied up with the intestines of his son Nari, and his son Narvi was turned into a wolf. Skathi took a poisonous snake and tied it up over Loki; poison dripped on his face from its mouth. Loki's wife Sigyn sat there and caught the poison in a jar. But when the jar filled, she had to empty it, and when she did, poison dripped on Loki's face. And this hurt him so badly that he trembled, and all the world with him. This is what is called an earthquake.

Thrymskvitha (The Theft of Mjollnir)

Thrymskvitha (literally "Thrym's Poem") tells one of the most popular stories in the Eddic poems, presenting a humorous depiction of the masculine Thor dressing up as a bride to recover his hammer Mjollnir from the giant Thrym who has stolen it.

Thrymskvitha

1 THOR WAS ANGRY
when he awoke
and found his hammer
had gone missing.
He wrung his beard,
he wrung his hair,
the great Thor
searched all around.

2 And the first thing
that he said was this:
"Listen to me, Loki,
listen to this:
something never known
before, in Midgard
or in Asgard, has happened:
Mjollnir's been stolen!"

3 Then they went
to Freyja's lovely home,
and the first thing
Loki said was this:
"Freyja, would you lend me
your feather-suit
to help us get
Thor's hammer back?"

Freyja said:

4 "I would give it to you,
even if it were made of gold,

I would loan it to you,
even if it were made of silver."

5 Then Loki flew,
wearing Freyja's feather-suit—
its feathers whistled in the air—
till he left Asgard
and came within
Jotunheim.

6 There Thrym sat on a mound,
a king of giants;
he was fastening golden chains
on his dogs' necks,
and he was combing
the manes of his horses.

Thrym said:

7 "What news from the gods?
What news from the elves?
Why have you come alone
into Jotunheim, Loki?"

Loki said, "Bad news from the gods!
Bad news from the elves!
Have you hidden
the mighty Thor's hammer?"

8 Thrym said, "I have hidden
the mighty Thor's hammer
eight miles
beneath the earth.
No one will ever see
that hammer again
unless Freyja
is brought here as my bride."

9 Then Loki flew,
wearing Freyja's feather-suit—
its feathers whistled in the air—
till he left Jotunheim
and came into

Asgard.
He met Thor
in the center of Asgard,
and the first thing
Thor said was this:

10 "Were your efforts
rewarded on this journey?
Stay in the air, and tell me
what news you have.
Stories are often forgotten
when the teller sits down,
and lies are often told
when people lie down."

11 Loki said, "My efforts
were rewarded with this news:
Thrym, a king among giants,
has your hammer,
No one will ever find
that hammer again
unless Freyja
is brought to him for his bride."

12 Then they went
to find lovely Freyja,
and the first thing
Thor said was this:
"Freyja, put on a
wedding dress!
The two of us, man and woman,
are going to Jotunheim."

13 Freyja was angry;
she snorted so hard
that the homes of the gods
shook all around them,
her necklace Brisingamen
trembled on her neck:
"They would call me
a lewd, loose woman

if I went with you
to Jotunheim!"

14 Soon all the gods
met for a conference,
all the goddesses
met for a conference,
and the mighty gods
spoke a long time about
how they might get
Thor's hammer back.

15 Then Heimdall spoke,
the handsomest of gods,
as one of the Vanir
he could see the future:
"Let's put a wedding dress
on Thor! Let him
wear Freyja's necklace,
the Brisingamen.

16 "Let's hang keys
from his belt,
let's drape a woman's dress
down to his knees,
let's place jewels
on his chest,
and wrap a pretty headdress
around his head."

17 Then Thor,
the strong god, spoke:
"All the Aesir
would call me a sissy
if I let you
put a wedding dress on me."

18 Then Loki,
son of Laufey, spoke:
"Silence, Thor!
No more of that talk!
Unless you can get

your hammer back,
the giants will soon
live in Asgard!"

19 So they put
a wedding dress on Thor,
they put the Brisingamen
on his neck,
they put a chain of
jingling keys at his belt,
they draped a woman's dress
down to his knees,
they placed jewels
on his chest,
they wrapped a pretty headdress
around his head.

20 Then Loki,
son of Laufey, said:
"Now I'll go
as your serving-woman—
the two of us, man and woman,
are going to Jotunheim."

21 Then they took
Thor's goats,
and made them
pull the wagon.
Mountains crumbled,
and the ground burst in flame,
as Odin's son
drove into Jotunheim.

22 Then Thrym,
king of giants, spoke:
"Stand up, giants!
Spread hay on the seats!
Bring Freyja,
daughter of Njorth,
lord of Noatun,
closer to me, as my bride.

23 "Here at my home,
we giants have gold-horned cows
and black oxen
for our dinners,
I have plenty of treasures,
plenty of necklaces—
the only thing
I think I lack is Freyja."

24 Early in the evening
the giants gathered
and ale was brought
to all of them.
All on his own
Thor ate a whole ox,
eight salmon,
all the delicacies
reserved for the women,
and drank three whole kegs of mead.

25 Then Thrym,
king of giants, spoke:
"Who has ever seen
a woman eat like this?
I never saw a woman
take bites that big,
nor a girl who drinks
so much mead."

26 But Loki,
Thor's clever bridesmaid,
found words to answer
the giant's suspicions:
"Freyja could not eat
at all for eight nights;
that's just how eager she was
to come here to Jotunheim."

27 The giant lifted the veil,
hoping for a kiss,
but then he leapt back

the full length of the hall:
"Why are Freyja's eyes
so fierce and grim?
It seems to me that fire
is burning in those eyes."

28 But Loki,
Thor's clever bridesmaid,
found words to answer
the giant's suspicions:
"Freyja could not sleep
at all for eight nights;
that's just how eager she was
to come here to Jotunheim."

29 Then the giant's
poor sister came in,
she thought she would claim
the customary gift from the bride:
"Give me some
of your golden rings,
if you want to win
my love,
my affection,
a good welcome from me."

30 Then Thrym,
king of giants, spoke:
"Bring in the hammer
to bless the bride,
lay Mjollnir
on the bride's knees.
May Var, goddess of
wedding vows, bless us."

31 Then Thor,
that tough-minded fighter,
laughed with a full heart
gripping his hammer.
First he killed Thrym,
king of giants,

then he crippled
all the giant's kin.

32 Then he killed
the giant's old sister,
the one who had asked him
for the customary gift—
she received a blow
instead of money,
a hammer to her head
instead of golden rings—
and this is the way Odin's son
got his hammer back.

Volundarkvitha (The Escape of Volund the Smith)

Volundarkvitha fits somewhat uncertainly between the poems about the gods and the poems about the heroes. It tells of the famously cunning smith Volund (known in England as *Wayland,* in Germany as *Velent*); his marriage to a Valkyrie; his mauling, imprisonment, and enslavement by King Nithuth; and finally his revenge on that king, which takes the form of murdering his sons and raping his daughter Bothvild before Volund escapes on a flying machine he has constructed for himself. Volund is the only significant speaking character in a classical Old Norse text who is identified as an elf (*alfr*). The prose introduction is original to the manuscript.

Volundarkvitha

Nithuth was the name of a king in Sweden. He had two sons and a daughter named Bothvild.

There were three brothers, sons of King Finni: one was named Slagfinn, the other Egil, the third Volund. They skied and hunted, and when they came to Ulfdalir they made themselves houses there. There is a lake called Ulfsja there. Early in the morning they found three women at the lakeshore who were spinning thread. There were swan-skins near them, since the women were Valkyries. Two of them were daughters of King Hlothver, and these were Hlathguth the Swan-White and Hervor the Wise. The third was Olrun, daughter of Kjar, king of France. The men took these three women home with them. Egil married Olrun, Slagfinn took Hlathguth, and Volund took Hervor. They lived like this for seven winters. But then the women left them in order to visit battlefields, and never came home again. Egil and Slagfinn skied away to search for their wives, but Volund stayed home in Ulfdalir. He was, as far as men know, the most capable with his hands of all the people in the old sagas. King Nithuth had him seized, and this poem is about that:

1 WOMEN FLEW FROM THE SOUTH
through Mirkwood,
those young Valkyries
who choose mens' fates.

These southern ladies
paused to rest on a lakeshore,
they spun and weaved
precious threads.

2 Egil took one
for his wife,
he took that beauty
in his embrace.
Slagfinn took Hlathguth,
clad in swan-feathers,
and the third,
their sister, took
Volund's handsome neck
in her embrace.

3 Afterwards they stayed
for seven winters,
but in the eighth
they became anxious,
and in the ninth
they had to depart.
Those ladies yearned
for Mirkwood,
those Valkyries
were eager to judge wars.

4 The sharp-eyed archer Egil
and his brother Slagfinn
came home from hunting
and found their homes empty.
They went in and out
and looked all around,
but finally Egil skied east
to look for Olrun,
and Slagfinn skied south
to look for Hlathguth.

5 But Volund sat
alone in Ulfdalir;
he worked gold
and colorful jewels,

he assembled rings
and strung them on ropes.
In this way
he waited
to see whether his
lady would return.

6 Nithuth learned this,
the lord of Njari,
he heard that Volund
was alone in his valley.
He sent men in the night
wearing well-made armor,
their shields glimmered
in the light of the waning moon.

7 They dismounted
at Volund's doorstep,
they went inside
his vast home.
They saw Volund's
golden rings,
seven hundred altogether,
strung on a rope.

8 They took them in hand,
then put them back,
but stole a single one
before they stepped out.
Then the keen-eyed archer
Volund came home.
He had traveled
a long way that day.

9 He started to roast
the meat of a brown bear.
The kindling burned,
the dry wood burned,
the wind-dry logs burned,
and it warmed Volund.

10 Volund the elf
sat on the bearskin
and counted his rings,
but noticed one missing.
He thought it must be
Hervor, his wife—
he thought she'd come back,
and taken the ring.

11 He sat waiting for her
so long he fell asleep,
and when he awoke
he was bound in chains.
He saw the heavy chains
restraining his hands,
and on his feet
there were also solid locks.

12 He called out,
"Who are the kings
who have put chains on me,
who has tied me up?"

13 Nithuth, lord of Njari,
gave him an answer:
"Volund, you crafty elf,
where did you find
our treasures
in your valley?"

14 Volund said, "It was hardly
a hoard such as Sigurth's gold—
my home was not near
the mountains of the Rhine.
I remember
that we used to have yet more,
when we were a happy family
at home in Ulfdalir.

15 "Hlathguth and Hervor
were daughters of Hlothver.

Olrun, Kjar's daughter,
was a cunning sorceress."

16 Nithuth's queen came in
to the magnificent hall.
She stood proudly on the floor
and spoke: "This man,
who came in from the woods,
will not be happy."

King Nithuth gave his daughter the gold ring that he had taken from Volund. He himself carried Volund's sword. And the queen said:

17 "Volund shows his teeth
every time he sees that sword,
or when Bothvild wears
that ring in his presence.
His eyes are as cruel
as a glistening snake's.
Cut his sinews,
rob his strength,
and put him away
in Saevarstoth."

So Volund's hamstrings were cut, and he was placed on a small island next to the land, which was called Saevarstoth. There he made all kinds of treasures for the king, and no one dared to come to the island except the king himself. Volund said:

18 "My sword
shines on Nithuth's belt,
the sword I sharpened,
the sword I alone,
the greatest smith, could make,
the sword I hardened
with my unmatched skill.
Now that glistening sword
is always far from my sight,
since Nithuth will not bring
that treasure to my workshop.
His daughter Bothvild
also wears a treasure

never meant for her,
my bride's golden ring."

19 Volund worked, never sleeping,
constantly swinging his hammer.
He thought of a daring plot
to foil Nithuth.
Then Nithuth's two young sons,
the two boys,
came to see Volund's treasures
on the Island of Saevarstoth.

20 They came to the treasure chest,
they asked for the keys.
They realized Volund's skill
when they peered inside.
The boys saw
many ornaments,
all of them made
of gold and gems.

21 Volund said, "Come back alone,
just you two, the day after tomorrow.
I will give all this
gold to you if you do.
Don't tell the ladies,
don't tell the men—
don't tell anyone at all
that you're meeting with me."

22 Early on the appointed day,
one boy said to the other:
"Let's go see the rings."
So the two boys came
and asked for the keys.
They realized Volund's skill
when they peered inside.

23 He cut off the heads
of those young boys,
he hid their bodies
under his bellows.

But he took their skulls
and scalped them,
set them with silver,
and sent them as cups to Nithuth.

24 And from the eyes
of those young boys
he made jewels for
their mother, Nithuth's wife.
And Volund made ornaments
from the teeth
of her own two brothers,
for Bothvild, Nithuth's daughter.

25 BOTHVILD PRAISED
a ring Volund had made,
she told him it was broken:
"And I don't dare to tell it,"
she said, "to anyone but you."

Volund said:

26 "I'll repair it so that
your father on his throne
will look at it—and to him,
and to your mother,
it will look even better,
and you'll think so too,
when you wear it."

27 He gave her beer,
he could easily outdrink her,
and finally she sat in his chair
and she slept. Volund said,
"Now I have avenged
the wrongs done to me,
all except one
of the most wicked.

28 "I have done well.
I wish I were on my feet,
the ones cut from me
by the wicked men of Nithuth."
But then, laughing, Volund
launched himself in the air.
Bothvild wept as she left
the island—she wept for
her lover's departure,
and her father's anger.

29 Volund saw where
Nithuth's queen
stood outside
and went into the hall.
Volund perched
atop the wall and said:
"Are you awake, Nithuth,
lord of Njari?"

30 Nithuth said, "I am awake.
I have no joy,
I barely sleep
since my sons' death.
Your cold actions
have chilled me.
Now I wish I had never
dealt with Volund.

31 "Tell me, Volund,
you crafty elf,
what kind of fate
did my sons meet?"

32 Volund said, "First,
you must swear many oaths.
Swear by a ship's board,
by a shield's edge,
by a horse's withers,
by a sword's blade,
that you will not

harm my lover,
nor cause her death,
even if my new bride
is a woman of your kin,
even if she bears my child
inside your own hall.

33 "Then go to the workshop
that you forced me into.
There you'll find bags
full of blood.
I cut your boys'
heads off
and left their bodies
beneath the bellows.

34 "And after I scalped them,
I took the bare skulls
and decorated them with silver
before I sent them to you.
And after I took their
eyes out,
I turned them into jewels
for your crafty queen.

35 "I made jewels
from the teeth of those two boys,
and I sent those
to your daughter Bothvild.
Now Bothvild
walks about pregnant,
yes, the only daughter
of the two of you."

36 The king said,
"You could say nothing
more awful to me,
I would never torture you worse.
There is no man so tall
that he could reach you up there,
nor so good a shot
that he could shoot you down,

there where you hang
among the clouds, Volund."

37 Laughing, Volund
flew up and away,
and left the joyless Nithuth
sitting below.

38 Nithuth said, "Get up,
Thakkrath, my good servant,
go to my pretty daughter Bothvild.
Tell her to come to me
in fine dress,
to come talk to her father."

39 The king then said to her,
"Is it true, Bothvild,
what Volund said:
That you and he lay together?"

40 She said, "It is true, father,
everything he said to you is true.
Volund and I
lay together
on his island
a while—we never should have.
I couldn't fight him,
father,
I couldn't withstand him,
father."

Alvissmal (The Words of All-Wise)

In *Alvissmal*, a dwarf named "All-Wise" visits the home of Thor with the intent of marrying his daughter. Thor disapproves, and occupies the dwarf by asking him numerous questions of mythological trivia—namely, what various peoples (the Aesir, the Vanir, humans, dwarves, elves, etc.) call different phenomena of heaven and earth. The dwarf successfully answers all of his questions, but at the end it is revealed that Thor has been stalling for time, waiting for the sun to come up and turn the unlucky suitor to stone.

Alvissmal

All-Wise said:

1 "GET THE BENCHES READY!
Now I'm coming home
with a bride in tow.
It may not seem likely
to others around me—
but I won't sleep when I get home."

Thor said:

2 "Who is this man?
Why are you so pale around the nostrils?
Did you spend the night with a corpse?
It seems to me
you have a monster's appearance,
you have no business seeking a bride."

All-Wise said:

3 "I am named All-Wise.
I live beneath the earth
on my underground estate.
I came to visit you, Thor,
lord of the goat-chariot;
no one will make me retract my words."

Thor said:

4 "I will decide that,
since I am the bride's father,

and it's I who gets to say about her.
I was not home
when she was promised to you;
the girl is my daughter, and a goddess."

All-Wise said:

5 "Who is this man
who speaks
for the beautiful lady?
You scoundrel,
probably no one would defend you—
who gave you those rings that you wear?"

Thor said:

6 "I am named Thor.
I'm a wide-traveled man,
and son of long-bearded Odin.
If I don't consent,
you'll never get the girl;
you'll stay unmarried forever."

All-Wise said:

7 "I'd like to have
your consent,
and I'd certainly like the bride!
I would rather have her
than have to live without
that girl, who's lovely as snow."

Thor said:

8 "This girl's love
will never be yours,
my clever guest,
if you dare to leave this house
without telling me
what I want to know about every realm.

9 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what is the earth called

that people walk on
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

10 "Men call it Earth,
the Aesir call it Soil,
the Vanir call it Road,
giants call it Green,
elves call it Grower,
high gods call it Clay."

Thor said:

11 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the sky,
swirling above us,
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

12 "Humans call it Heaven,
the Aesir call it Wind-land,
the Vanir call it Wind-maker,
giants call it Up-world,
elves say 'the High Roof,'
dwarves say 'the Drip-House.'"

Thor said:

13 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the moon
(it's easy to see)
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

14 "Humans call it Moon,
Gods say 'Changer,'
in Hel they call it the Turning Wheel,
the giants call it Hurry—
dwarves call it Shiny,
and elves say 'Year-counter.'"

Thor said:

15 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the sun
(it's easy to see, too)
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

16 "Humans call it Sun,
Gods say 'Southern Ball,'
dwarves call it Dvalin's Toy,
giants say 'Everglow,'
elves call it the Beautiful Wheel;
the Aesir say 'All-clear.'"

Thor said:

17 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call
the rain-making clouds
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

18 "Humans say 'Clouds,'
but gods say 'Hope of Rain,'
the Vanir call them Wind-floats,
giants Hope of Hail,
elves say 'Weather-Causers,'
in Hel they call them Helmets of the Hidden."

Thor said:

19 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the wind,
which travels so widely,
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

20 "Humans call it Wind,
the gods call it Blower,
the holy say 'Noisemaker,'
giants call it the Screamer,
elves say 'Noisy Traveler,'
in Hel they call it Stormy."

Thor said:

21 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call it
when the wind stands still
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

22 "Humans call it Calm,
the gods say 'Unblowing,'
Vanir say 'Wind-stop,'
giants say 'Stop-blowing,'
elves call it Day's Sleep,
but dwarves say 'Day's Feint.'

Thor said:

23 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the sea
that boats are rowed on
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

24 "Humans call it Ocean,
gods prefer the name Sea,
Vanir call it Restful Harbor,
giants say 'Eel-home,'
elves call it Oar-place,
the dwarves say 'Deep, deep sea.'

Thor said:

25 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call fire,
which burns before our eyes,
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

26 "Humans call it Fire,
the Aesir call it Flame,
Vanir call it Warmer,
giants say 'the Bold One,'
dwarves call it Burner,
'Mover' is its name in Hel."

Thor said:

27 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the woods
that grow before our eyes
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

28 "Humans call them the Woods,
but gods say 'Wool of the Plains,'
other men call them Hill-hilts,
giants call them Firewood,
elves say 'Pretty Leaves,'
the Vanir call them Wands."

Thor said:

29 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the night,
child of Norvi,
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

30 "Humans call it Night,
gods say 'the Darkness,'
the holy gods say 'the Masked One,'
giants call it the Un-light,
elves say 'Good to Sleep In,'
dwarves say 'Queen of Dreams.'"

Thor said:

31 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call seed
that is sown in the earth
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

32 "Humans call it Barley,
gods say 'Grain,'
Vanir call it Grower,
giants say 'Good Eating;'
elves call it Things to Make Beer,
in Hel they call it Sunken."

Thor said:

33 "Tell me, All-Wise—
since I think you know
everything about everyone, dwarf—
what do they call the ale
that everyone drinks
in every world?"

All-Wise said:

34 "Humans call it Ale,
the Aesir call it Beer,
the Vanir call it Wine,
giants call it Cleansing Drink,
but in Hel they say 'Mead'—
the giant sons of Suttung call it Toast.

Thor said:

35 "I've never seen
a single creature
who knew so much old lore!
But I have deceived you, All-Wise,
with a terrible lie:
You're still up, and it's dawn, dwarf—
the sun shines in the hall!"

Baldrs draumar (Balder's Dreams)

Baldrs draumar ("Balder's Dreams") does not appear in the *Codex Regius* manuscript, but it does appear in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to alongside several poems that do occur in the *Codex Regius* (such as *Harbarthsljoth* and *Hymiskvitha*). It is also clearly linked with the Poetic Edda by its form and content. As in *Voluspa,* Odin awakens a dead witch and asks her for information—in this case, the meaning of the worrisome dreams that his son Balder is having about his own death.

Baldrs draumar

1 ONCE ALL THE GODS
met for a conference,
all the goddesses
met for a conference,
and the mighty gods
talked about
why Balder was having
bad dreams.

2 Odin stood up,
that father of gods,
and he saddled
his horse Sleipnir.
Then he rode
down to Hel,
till he saw
the dog of Hel.

3 The dog
had a bloody chest
and barked a long time
as Odin passed.
Odin rode on,
the stones of the road rattled,
till he came to the high
house of Hel.

4 Then Odin rode
east of the door to Hel,
and there he found
the grave of a witch,
and then the battle-god
spoke a spell,
till her corpse
was forced to rise, and spoke:

5 "Who is this man,
unknown to me,
who has brought me back
to loathsome life?
I was buried in snow,
pelted by rain,
drowned in dew,
I was dead a long time."

Odin said:

6 "I am the Road-tamer,
son of Corpse-tamer.
Tell me news from Hel,
and I'll tell you news from above.
Whose arrival are these benches
draped with straw for?
Why is the floor all
covered in gold?"

The witch said:

7 "The mead is brewed
for Balder's arrival,
a shield is placed over
the fresh brew.
All the gods
are in suspense.
I was forced to speak,
now I return to silence."

Odin said:

8 "Don't go silent, witch!
I want to ask you more,
till I understand everything,
and I want to know more.
Who will be the killer
of my son Balder?
Who will steal the life
of Odin's son?"

The witch said:

9 "Hoth will bear
the long spear that will kill him,
he will be the killer
of your son Balder,
he will steal the life
of Odin's son.
I was forced to speak,
now I return to silence."

Odin said:

10 "Don't go silent, witch!
I want to ask you more,
till I understand everything,
and I want to know more.
Who will avenge
Hoth's crime?
Who will put Balder's killer
on the funeral pyre?"

The witch said:

11 "In halls to the west
Rind will give birth to your son Vali;
he will avenge Balder
when he is only one night old.
He will neither comb his hair
nor wash his hands
till he puts Balder's killer
on the funeral pyre.
I was forced to speak,
now I return to silence."

Odin said:

12 "Don't go silent, witch!
I want to ask you more,
till I understand everything,
and I want to know more.
Who are the women
who weep in longing,
who throw their necklaces
up into the sky?"

The witch said:

13 "You are not Road-tamer,
like I thought you were—
no, you are Odin,
the aged god."

Odin said:

14 "You are neither a witch,
nor a wise woman—
no, you are the mother
of three monsters."

The witch said:

15 "Ride home, Odin!
Feel triumphant, for now.
But you will come
for a second visit
when Loki breaks free
from his chains,
and Ragnarok
comes to end everything."

Rigsthula (The Tale of Rig)

Rigsthula ("Rig's List"), another mythological poem not present in the *Codex Regius*, tells of the sexual adventures of the god Heimdall (here called Rig), and how he fathered the different classes of human beings, a myth that was well-known enough to be cited in the opening lines of *Voluspa* (where humans are referred to as "all classes of men,/ you greater and lesser/ children of Heimdall"). Heimdall sleeps first between Ai and Edda, whose names mean "great-grandfather" and "great-grandmother," respectively, and then in succession with Afi and Amma ("grandfather" and "grandmother"), and Father and Mother (the Old Norse words are virtually identical with the English: *fathir* and *mothir*). With the first couple he fathers the slaves or peasants, with the second he fathers the commoners, and with the third he fathers the nobility. The first man and woman of each class then have children of their own, many of them with obviously meaningful names, which I have rendered with an English equivalent where the meaning of the Old Norse name is clear. Finally, in the last haunting stanza of the (incomplete?) poem, the youngest child of the noble family, named King, is encouraged by a crow to wage war on his prosperous neighbors. The values that the elites of Norse society attributed to the three classes of society—low, middle, and high—are clear to be seen in this poem, one of the most sociologically transparent artifacts of its time.

Rigsthula

Men say in old sagas that one of the Aesir, the god named Heimdall, went on a journey along a certain seashore, and soon he came to a farm, where he gave his name as Rig. This poem is about that story.

1

IT IS SAID THAT
a wise god, Rig,
powerful and aged,
fierce and strong,
walked upon
green roads.

2 In the middle of the road
he came walking.
He came to a house,
the door was open.
He went in,
a fire burned on the floor,
and a gray-haired couple
sat before it,
named Ai and Edda;
they were an aged pair.

3 Rig knew how to
give them good counsel.
He sat down
between them,
with the man and the woman
on either side of him.

4 Then Edda took
a swollen loaf of bread,
heavy and thick,
stuffed with grains,
and she put that, and more,
in the middle of the table.
There was soup in a bowl,
and boiled calf-meat
was set on the table;
that was the best of their delicacies.

5 Rig rose from his seat
and was ready for sleep;
he knew how to
give them good counsel.
He lay down in bed
between them,
with the man and the woman
on either side of him.

6 He was there
three nights in a row,
then he went walking

in the middle of the road,
and nine months
soon passed.

7 Edda had a child.
They splashed him with water,
wrapped him in dark clothes,
and named him Slave.

8 Slave grew up
and did well for himself.
His hands had
scabby skin,
knobby knuckles,
and fat fingers.
His face was ugly,
he had a bad back,
and a long pair of heels on his feet.

9 Soon he got a chance
to test his strength.
He made rope,
he made baskets,
all day he carried
firewood home.

10 Then a woman
came wandering his way,
with scars on her feet,
and sunburnt arms.
She had a hook nose,
and her name was Slavewoman.

11 She sat down
in the middle of the floor.
And Slave sat down
next to her.
They spoke and they whispered,
Slave and Slavewoman,
they readied a bed
after a hard day's work.

12 They had children,
they taught them and loved them.
I think their sons were named
Lumpy and Barn-cleaner,
Noisy and Horsefly,
Sleeper, Stinker,
Midget, Fatboy,
Slow and Gray-hair,
Hunchback and Dangle-leg;
they made fences,
they planted fields,
they raised pigs,
they herded goats,
they shoveled manure.

13 Their daughters were
Shorty and Fatty,
Fat-calf
and Beak-nose,
Shriek and Slavegirl,
Gossip,
Skinny-hips,
and Bird-legs.
All the families of slaves
are descended from them.

14 Rig went on
upon his way.
He came to a hall,
the door was open.
He went inside,
a fire burned on the floor.
A couple sat there,
busy with their work.

15 The man was busy
with wood-carving.
His beard was trimmed,
his hair lay in locks on his forehead,
his shirt was tailored,
he owned a chest of drawers.

16 His wife sat
and spun her spinning-wheel
with her arms,
she was weaving.
She had a headdress,
she wore a blouse,
she had a lace choker,
and jeweled brooches.
Afi and Amma
were their names.

17 Rig knew how to
give them good counsel.
He rose from the table,
ready to sleep.
He lay down in bed
between them,
with the man and the woman
on either side of him.

18 He was there
three nights in a row,
and nine months
soon passed.

19 Amma had a child.
They splashed him with water
and named him Freeman.
His mother wrapped
her red-haired, ruddy child
in cloth; his eyes were keen.

20 He grew up,
and did well for himself.
He tamed oxen,
he made a plow,
he built houses
and he built barns,
he made wagons
and drove a plow.

21 Then they brought him
a housewife with her keys
in goat-skin clothes,
and married her to Freeman.
She was named In-law,
she wore the bridal veil.
That couple lived together,
they exchanged rings,
they shared their sheets,
and made a home.

22 They had children,
they taught them and loved them.
Their sons were Manful and Fighter,
Brave, Swordsman, and Smith,
Stout, Farmer,
Trimbeard,
Rancher and Husband,
Sharp-Beard and Manly.

23 And they had daughters
with these names:
Smart, Bride, Swan,
Lady, Dame,
Girl, Noblewoman, Wife,
Shy, and Vivacious.
All the families of free farmers
are descended from them.

24 Rig went on
upon his way,
he came to a hall,
with the door facing south
and standing open—
there was a ring
for knocking on the door.

25 He went in, and found
the floor covered with straw.
A husband and wife sat there
and looked in one another's eyes.

They were named Father and Mother,
they held one another's hands.

26 The husband sat
and strung his bow;
he bent its shaft
and made arrows for it.
His wife inspected
the sleeves of her blouse,
stroked the wrinkles out,
smoothed them out.

27 She adjusted her headdress,
she had a jewel on her chest,
a long dress,
and a blue-colored blouse.
Her face was more beautiful,
her breast was more beautiful,
her neck was more beautiful
than pure snow.

28 Rig knew how to
give them good counsel.
He sat down
between them,
with the man and the woman
on either side of him.

29 Then Mother brought out
a fine white
ornamental cloth
and covered the table.
She brought out
thin-sliced bread
made of white wheat
and filled the table.

30 She set out
full plates, and treasures
of silverware on the table,
loaded with meat and poultry.
They drank wine

from gemstone beakers,
they drank and talked,
till the day turned to night.

31 Rig knew how to
give them good counsel.
He rose from his seat
and prepared the bed.
He was there
three nights in a row,
then he went walking again
in the middle of the road,
and nine months
soon passed.

32 Mother had a child,
she swaddled him in silk,
they sprinkled water over him,
they named him Lord.
His hair was blonde,
his cheeks were bright,
his eyes were as cruel
and clear as vipers'.

33 They raised Lord
there in their home;
he learned to hold a shield,
to string a bow,
to bend a bow,
to carve an arrow,
to throw a spear,
to cast a javelin,
to ride a horse,
to hunt with dogs,
to draw a sword,
to swim competitively.

34 Then Rig
came walking
to their farm,
he taught Lord runes,
gave him his own name,

called him his son,
told him
to claim lands,
to conquer lands,
conquer old villages.

35 He rode then
through the
icy mountains of Mirkwood,
till he came to a hall
and shook his spear,
shook his shield,
set his horse to a gallop
and drew his sword:
he started a war,
he reddened the fields with blood,
he killed many men,
he conquered lands.

36 He became sole owner
of eighteen estates,
he shared his wealth,
he gave his men
treasures upon treasures,
and good horses.
He gave away rings;
he did not care to hoard them.

37 Then messengers came
along well-prepared roads,
they came to the hall
where that chieftain lived.
They presented
the beautiful, soft-fingered,
wise girl,
whose name was Eagle.

38 They offered Lord the girl,
took her to his home,
married her to him,
she wore the bridal veil.
Then they lived together

and loved one another,
they increased their family
and enjoyed their days.

39 Their oldest son was Boy
and the next was Kid,
then Offspring and Noble,
Heir and Scion,
Descendant and Successor,
Son and Lad,
another was Nobility,
and the youngest was named King—
they played together,
they learned to swim, and play chess.

40 The sons of Lord
grew up there,
they broke horses,
they made shields,
they shot arrows,
they made war.

41 But young King
learned runes,
runes of fate
and runes of destiny,
he learned spells
to save lives
and dull blades,
to calm storms.

42 He learned the language of birds;
he learned to put out fires,
to calm sorrows and induce sleep,
and give comfort in sorrow.
He had the strength,
the passion, of eight men.

43 Rig shared runes
with him,
but King tricked him,
and learned them better than he,

and then he earned
the right to call himself
by the name of Rig,
for his rune-lore.

44 Young King
rode with his arrows;
he shot arrows,
he killed birds.

45 Then a crow said to him,
a crow sitting on a high branch:
"Why do you kill birds,
young king?
It would be better
to mount up on your horse,
and kill men.

46 "I know two chieftains
with rich halls, they live nearby,
they have bigger inheritances
than you have—
they know how to steer ships,
they know how to sharpen blades,
they know how to kill men."

Voluspa en skamma (The Short Prophecy of Ragnarok)

Voluspa en skamma (literally "The Short *Voluspa*"), the name given to parts of this poem quoted in the Prose Edda, is another mythological poem from outside the *Codex Regius*. It appears in its entirety in the manuscript *Flateyjarbok*, where it is identified as *Hyndluljoth* ("Song of Hyndla"). In it, the dead witch Hyndla tells the goddess Freyja and a human warrior named Ottar of Ottar's ancestry, eventually tracing him back to the gods and telling a little about the gods and their fates. It is usually believed that the stanzas dealing with the gods (st. 30–50) were originally a separate poem (the *Voluspa en skamma* proper) and that the first twenty-nine stanzas dealing with Ottar's ancestry were only added to it by a later editor. Whether originally a single poem or not, the poem appears to have been composed fairly late.

Voluspa en skamma

Freyja said:

1 "WAKE UP, LADY,
wake up, friend,
wake up, sister,
Hyndla, you cave-dweller.
The night is dark;
we will ride
to Valhalla,
to the holy hall.

2 "We'll ask Odin
to keep us in mind;
he gives gold
to those who are worthy.
He gave Hermoth
a helmet and armor,
he gave Sigmund
a sword as a gift.

3 "He gives victory to some,
money to others,

eloquence to many,
and common sense to all.
He gives waves to the sea,
word-skill to poets,
he gives many
the happiness of love.

4 "I will sacrifice
to Thor, and ask him
to support you always
and look on you with a smile,
no matter how much
he hates other giant-women.

5 "Now take a wolf
out of your stable,
let him walk
alongside my hog."

Hyndla said:

"I doubt the hog
will walk the god's road;
I don't want to saddle
my swift wolf.

6 "You lie, Freyja,
you want to tempt me.
But your eyes
tell me everything.
Your lover,
young Ottar,
son of Innstein,
follows on the road of the dead."

Freyja said:

7 "You are being foolish;
you are dreaming, Hyndla,
if you think my lover
follows me on the road of the dead,
where the hog
Gullinbusti glows,
that battle-swine

which two crafty dwarves,
Dain and Nabbi,
made for me.

8 "I'll step out of the saddle,
we'll sit together
and speak together
about great families,
about the good men
descended from the gods.

9 "They have dared much,
young Ottar
and Angantyr,
to take the gold of Valland.
A young man
needs good counsel,
if he wants to get his
inheritance from his kin.

10 "Ottar made me
a temple of stone,
and the stones of that temple
glisten like glass,
reddened with fresh blood
from sacrificed oxen—
Ottar believed faithfully
in the goddesses.

11 "Now, you must
name noble men,
and all the best
human families:
Who are the Skjoldungs?
Who are the Skilfings?
Who are the Authlings?
Who are the Ylfings?
Who are the best prince's sons,
the best chieftain's sons,
the best of all men
in all of Midgard?"

Hyndla said:

12 "You, Ottar,
are Innstein's son,
and Innstein was
the son of Alf the Old.
Alf was Ulf's son,
Ulf was Saefari's,
Saefari was the son of
Svan the Red.

13 "Your father's mother
was beautifully bejeweled,
she must have been
the priestess of Hlethi.
Her father was Frothi,
her mother was Friaut,
that whole family
was well-born.

14 "In olden days,
Ali was the best man,
and before him, Halfdan
was chief of the Skjoldungs.
Those princes
are remembered for their killings,
and Ali's accomplishments
are known around the world.

15 "He was the in-law
of Eymund, a great hero.
He killed Sigtrygg
with a cold sword-blade.
He married Almveig,
best of women,
and together they raised
eighteen sons.

16 "From them come the Skjoldungs,
the Skilfings,
the Authlings,
the Ynglings,

the best prince's sons,
the best chieftain's sons,
the best of all men
in all of Midgard.
And this is your family,
foolish Ottar.

17 "Hildigunn
was her mother,
the daughter of Svava
and a Sea-King.
And this is your family,
foolish Ottar.
It would profit you to know it—
do you want to know still more?

18 "Dag married Thora,
mother of warriors,
there were great men
born in that line:
Frathmar and Gyrth,
both the Frekars,
Am, Josurmar,
and Alf the Old.
It would profit you to know it—
do you want to know still more?

19 "Ketill was their friend,
he was heir to Klyp,
he was the grandfather
of your mother.
Frothi was born
before Kari,
but Alf
was born earliest.

20 "Then Nanna,
who was Nokkvi's daughter.
Her son was the
in-law of your father.
These are old relatives,
but I can speak still more.

I knew Brodd,
and Horfi also.
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

21 "Isolf and Asolf,
sons of Almoth
and his wife Skurhild,
who was Skekkil's daughter—
you are related
to many great men.
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

22 "Gunnar the Steadfast,
Grim the Plow-Smith,
Thori Iron-Shield,
Ulf the Howler.

23 "Bui and Brami,
Barri and Reifnir,
Tind and Tyrfing,
the two Haddings,
this is your family,
foolish Ottar.

24 "Ani and Omi,
Arngrim's sons,
were born
to Eyfura.
The noise of all kinds of evil
caused by those berserks
went over land and sea
like a wildfire.
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

25 "I knew both
Brodd and Horfi,
brave companions
of Hrolf the Old.
Those families are

descended from Jormunrekk,
Sigurth's in-law,
and Sigurth was the prince
who killed Fafnir.
Listen to my story.

26 "The prince Sigurth
was a descendant of Volsung,
his mother Hjordis
was descended from Hrauthung,
and her father Eylimi
from the Authlings;
this is your family,
foolish Ottar.

27 "Gunnar and Hogni
were the sons of Gjuki,
and Guthrun
was their sister.
Gotthorm was not
the son of Gjuki,
but his mother was the same
as Gunnar's and Hogni's.
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

28 "Harald Wartooth
was son of
Hrorek, the hater of riches.
Hrorek was the son of Auth,
and Auth the Wise
was the daughter of Ivar.
Rathbarth was
the father of Randver;
those men
were blessed by the gods
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

29 “There were eleven
of the gods,
after doomed
Balder fell.
Vali then
craved vengeance,
and so he killed
the killer of his brother.
This is your family,
foolish Ottar.

30 “Balder’s father
was Odin, heir of Bur,
and Frey married Gerth,
who was the daughter of Gymir,
a man of giant family,
married to Aurbotha.
Thjassi was
their kinsman,
a good archer and a giant,
and his daughter was Skathi.

31 “I have told you much,
and I remember still more.
I suspect that few know all this—
do you want to know more?

32 “Haki was the best son
of Hvaedna by far,
and Hvaedna’s father
was Hjorvarth.
Heith and Hrossthjof
were the giant Hrimnir’s children.

33 “All the witches
come from Vitholf,
all the wizards
come from Vilmeith,
all the warlocks
come from Svarthofthi,

all the giants
come from Ymir.

34 "I have told you much,
and I remember still more.
I suspect that few know all this—
do you want to know more?

35 "There was one born
in ancient times,
a very powerful son
of the family of the gods.
He had nine mothers,
those nine giant women
gave birth to the noble spearman
at the edge of the world.

36 "I have told you much,
and I remember still more.
I suspect that few know all this—
do you want to know more?

37 "His mothers were Gjalp,
and Greip,
Eistla
and Eyrgjafa,
Ulfrun
and Angreyja,
Imth and Atla
and Jarnsaxa.

38 "The earth gave him
strength to grow,
as did the cold sea,
and the blood of the boar.

39 "I have told you much,
and I remember still more.
Certainly few know all this—
do you want to know more?

40 “Loki fathered
a wolf with Angerbotha:
he fathered Sleipnir
with Svathilfari.
But there was one child
worse than all the others
of those born to
Byleist’s brother Loki.

41 “Loki ate a woman’s heart,
he found it
half-burned
on a burning linden tree.
Loki became pregnant
from that dead evil woman,
and from their child
come all the troll-women.

42 “The storm-stirred sea
heaves up to heaven,
it drowns the lands
and chokes all the air.
Then come snow-storms
and sharp winds,
then the time comes near
when the gods will fall.

43 “One was born,
greater than all others,
the earth gave him
strength to grow.
They say that he
was boldest of all,
he was related
to all the classes of men.

44 “But another will come,
a god even greater,
and I dare not
speak his name.
Few can see further,

beyond the day
when the wolf
will swallow Odin."

Freyja said:

45 "Give a memory-drink
to Ottar,
so that three days from now
he can remember
each word
of what you say,
when he and Angantyr
reckon their family trees."

Hyndla said:

46 "Hurry away from here,
I want to sleep.
You learned nothing from me
of my own free choice.
Leave here
in the night
like a ewe
with your ram.

47 "You ran after Odin,
you're always lustful,
and you've slept
with many others.
Leave here
in the night
like a ewe
with your ram."

Freyja said:

48 "I will strike a fire
around you, giant-woman,
make it so you cannot
leave here unburned—
so *you* can't leave here
in the night
like a ewe
with your ram."

Hyndla said:

49 "I see a fire kindling,
I see the earth burn.
But most living things
have to endure death.
Take a beer
to Ottar,
a poison-mixed
drink for ill health."

Freyja said:

50 "Your curse
will do no harm,
giant woman,
no matter what you threaten.
He will drink
only good drinks.
I ask all the gods
to help Ottar!"

Grottasongr (The Song of Grotti)

Grottasongr (literally "Song of Grotti") is the last of the poems in this collection that are not included in the *Codex Regius* manuscript. Here, we read of two giant women who were purchased as slaves by the legendary Danish king Frothi to work his magical mill named Grotti, which would grind out whatever was asked of it (this magical item is similar to the *Sampo* of Finnish legend). Initially, the giant women are told to grind out peace and wealth for Frothi, but toward the end they use it to create an army to avenge themselves on Frothi.

"Spellcaster" (who sells Frothi the slaves) and "Hangjaw" (who gives Frothi the millstone) are unusual names, but these men are no doubt Odin himself in disguise, as these are among the names of Odin that Odin himself lists in *Grimnismal*. The prose introduction is from the Prose Edda, one of the sources in which this poem is quoted.

Grottasongr

Skjold was a son of Odin; the Skjoldungs are descended from him. He had his throne and ruled in lands that are now called part of Denmark, but then were called Gotland. Skjold had a son named Frithleif who ruled these lands after him. The son of Frithleif was named Frothi. He inherited the land from his father during the time when Augustus Caesar made the whole world peaceful, the time when Christ was born. And since Frothi was the most powerful of all kings in Scandinavia, the peace was credited to him wherever Norse was spoken, and Scandinavians called it the Peace of Frothi. No man did any injury to another, even if he met his father's or his brother's killer, whether free or in chains. There was no theft or robbery either, such that a gold ring was able to be left out in the open at Jalangerheith for a long time.

King Frothi went to Sweden for a visit with the king named Spellcaster, and on this visit he bought two slavewomen, named Fenja and Menja, who were both big and strong.

At this time in Denmark there was a millstone so big that no one was strong enough to grind with it. And the millstone had an unusual power, that it would produce whatever the grinder told it to produce. The millstone was named Grotti. Hangjaw was the

name of the man who had given the millstone to Frothi. Frothi brought his two new slavewomen to the millstone and ordered them to make gold and peace and joy with it for him. But for rest or sleep he allowed them only as much time as a cuckoo might stay silent in, or that one might be able to sing a song in.

Then it is said that Fenja and Menja sang a song called *The Song of Grotti*. And before the song was done, they had ground out an army against Frothi. And that very night, the sea-king named Mysing came and killed Frothi and took a great deal of loot. Thus ended the Peace of Frothi.

Mysing took the millstone Grotti with him on the ship, and also Fenja and Menja, and there he told them to grind out salt, and to keep grinding. They ground for only a little while before the ships sank, and now there is a whirlpool in the sea, where the sea spins around in a circle like a millstone. This is how the sea became salty.

1 NOW THERE WERE
two forward-seeing women,
Fenja and Menja,
in the king's house.
But these two women
were taken
as slaves
by Frothi, Frithleif's son.

2 The women were led
to the millstone,
they were told to push
the gray millstone around.
He promised them
they'd have neither joy nor peace
if he couldn't hear
the grinding of that millstone.

3 The two women
sang a working song:
"Let's put our backs in it,
let's push the stone."
Frothi told the girls
to grind endlessly.

4 They sang, and they
pushed the millstone,
while most of the workers
of Frothi were sleeping.
Then Menja spoke
as she was grinding:

5 "We are grinding
wealth and joy,
and too much property,
on this wish-stone, all for Frothi;
Frothi sits on gold
and sleeps on down pillows,
he wakes up when he likes,
and we grind on.

6 "Here no one
hurts anyone else,
there are no bad deeds,
no violent deaths.
The sword sleeps
tranquil in its sheath,
even if a man meets
his brother's killer."

7 The king said
nothing to them, except:
"Don't sleep any longer
than a cuckoo sleeps!
Don't sleep any longer
than it takes me to sing a song!"

8 Fenja said, "Frothi,
you're a wise king,
but you were not wise
when you bought us.
You chose us for
our looks and strength,
but you asked nothing
about our ancestry.

9 “Hrungnir was tough,
so was his father,
and yet Thjassi
accomplished still more.
The mountain-giants
Ithi and Aurnir
are our relatives,
we were born into their family.

10 “Grotti, the hard millstone,
would never have
come out of the rock,
never come out of the earth,
and we giant women
would not grind so endlessly,
if we had known anything
about our fate.

11 “We grew up
nine winters
and played as young girls
deep beneath the earth.
Then we started
to show our strength;
we are the ones who shoved
the stone from its place.

12 “We rolled the stone
up out of the ground,
so that the whole earth
started shaking.
Then we threw down
this ring of stone,
this heavy rock,
so humans could take it.

13 “Then we two
wise giant women
went down to Sweden
among the armies.
We killed berserkers,

we broke shields,
we went straight through
the troops in their chainmail.

14 "We helped one king,
and harmed another.
We gave help
to Gotthorm the Good.
We did not sit quiet
when Knui fell.

15 "We played like this
for years,
our deeds made us famous
as champions:
our spears spilled
rivers of blood,
our swords
were reddened in wounds.

16 "Now we've been kept
in the house of a king,
made slaves
and shown no mercy.
The dirt's bitten our bare feet,
we've frozen in the cold,
we've labored at the millstone,
but all's not well with Frothi.

17 "Now my hands will rest,
the millstone will stop.
I have ground all I will,
and my work is done.
I would have
fallen dead
before I ground out
everything that Frothi wanted.

18 "Let's grind out
warriors' hands, hard helmets,
bloody weapons!
Wake up, Frothi!

Wake up now, Frothi,
if you want to hear
our songs
and our old stories.

19 "I see a fire burning
east of the city,
an army is awakened,
and that will be the signal.
An army is coming
here in haste,
they are setting fire
in the king's own home.

20 "Frothi, you will no longer
hold the throne at Lejre,
nor the gold rings,
nor this royal millstone.
Put your back in it,
sister, a little harder!
It isn't yet warm
with men's blood.

21 "Oh, sister,
you ground hard there,
for I saw the death
of a great many men.
There I saw the big
iron-fastened supports
below the millstone break—
let's grind still more.

22 "Let's grind still more!
And King Hrolf
will avenge Halfdan
on King Frothi.
He will be called
his mother's son
and also her brother,
we both know that."

23 The women ground more,
they stretched their strength,
those young women
raged like the giants they were.
The mill's support beam shook,
the stone rattled,
the hard stone halves
of the mill came loose.

24 Then one
of the two giant women said:
"We have ground, Frothi,
and now we'll stop.
We have worked
this millstone long enough."

Poems about Heroes

Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar (The Poem of Helgi, Son of Hjorvarth)

Following the poems about the gods, the first three heroic poems in the Poetic Edda concern Helgi, a hero who is reincarnated at least twice (according to the poems themselves). In one of these poems he is the son of Hjorvarth, and in the other two the son of Sigmund. It is possible that both Helgi characters stem from one common traditional hero, and that we are dealing with different versions of the same original story that have become so divergent from one another that a later editor inserted the reincarnation of the hero to explain why he is said to be the son of two different men in different poems.

In the *Codex Regius*, the order of these three poems is different than what is given here (the order in the manuscript is *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*, then *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*, then *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*). However, since Helgi Hjorvarthsson is a different Helgi than Helgi Sigmundsson in the other two, I have moved *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* to the front in order to keep the two poems about Helgi Sigmundsson together.

Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar is a difficult poem: it probably consists of several fragments of poetic dialogue pieced together by a later editor, and then connected by means of explanatory prose sections between them. A short summary will be needed to help orient the reader.

The first part of the poem (including st. 1–5 and the large amount of prose surrounding them) concerns not Helgi himself but his father King Hjorvarth, and his follower Atli. Hjorvarth sends Atli to ask for the hand of Sigerlinn, daughter of King Svafnir, after a bird informs Atli that Sigerlinn is the most beautiful woman in the world. The marriage proposal is refused, which prompts

Hjorvarth to travel with Atli to make his case in person. However, upon reaching Svafnir's kingdom, they find that he has already been killed by his rival King Hrothmar. Hjorvarth marries Sigerlinn.

Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn have a son, and for many years they are unable to give him a name. But the boy encounters a troop of Valkyries led by Svava, who gives him the name Helgi and gives him directions to find a special sword. Helgi then leads an army to defeat King Hrothmar (who had killed King Svafnir) with the aid of Atli. Helgi and Atli also kill a giant, and there is an unusual exchange between Atli and the giant's daughter Hrimgerth; this takes up stanzas 12–23. Helgi joins the exchange of insults in stanzas 24–30, where we learn that Svava and her Valkyries have protected Helgi from having his ships destroyed by Hrimgerth. Helgi and Atli keep Hrimgerth talking till the sun rises and turns her to stone (the same trick Thor uses against the dwarf in *Alvissmal*).

Helgi and Svava promise to marry one another, but Svava continues to live with her father. Later, Helgi's half-brother Hethin is away from home when he meets a troll-woman and he refuses to let her accompany him. She tells him that he will pay for this at the upcoming feast when oaths are sworn. At this feast, her promise is fulfilled when Hethin swears he will take Helgi's fiancée Svava for himself, but he regrets his oath and wanders in the wilderness.

Helgi eventually encounters Hethin, who tells him about his oath. Helgi assures him that this is for the best, since he has been challenged to a duel by King Alf (son of his old enemy King Hrothmar). Helgi expects he will die in this duel, in which case it would please him to know that his beloved will be in the care of his brother Hethin.

Helgi is mortally wounded in the duel, and sends for Svava. Helgi begs her to marry his brother Hethin in his stead, but she says she will keep her promise to love no man but Helgi. The poem ends with Hethin swearing to Svava that he will not return home before he has avenged Helgi's death.

Concerning Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn

A king was named Hjorvarth; he had four wives. One was named Alfhild, and their son was named Hethin. The second was named Saereith, and their son was named Humlung. The third was named Sinrjoth, and their son was named Hymling.

King Hjorvarth had sworn an oath to marry the most beautiful woman he saw. He learned that King Svafnir had a daughter who was most beautiful of all, named Sigerlinn. King Hjorvarth had a man at his court named Ithmund, and Ithmund's son Atli went to ask for Sigerlinn's hand in marriage to King Hjorvarth. Atli stayed the whole winter with King Svafnir. King Svafnir had an important follower named Franmar, and he was the foster-father of Sigerlinn. Franmar had a daughter named Alof. Franmar told Atli that the girl would not be married to King Hjorvarth, and then Atli rode away.

Atli stood one day in a grove, and he heard a bird sitting in the tree branches above him; the bird had heard Atli's men say that there was no woman more beautiful than King Hjorvarth's wives. The bird called, and Atli listened to what it said.

The bird said:

1 "Did you see Sigerlinn,
Svafnir's daughter,
the most beautiful woman
in the entire world?
She's more beautiful
than Hjorvarth's wives,
though they seem beautiful enough
to the men at Glasislund."

Atli said:

2 "Will you say more
to Atli,
son of Ithmund,
you wise-remembering bird?"

The bird said:

"I would—if you, young man,
would give me a sacrifice.
I'll choose what I want
from the king's household."

Atli said:

3 "Don't choose Hjorvarth,
nor his sons,
nor the king's
lovely brides,
the wives
of King Hjorvarth.
But we'll make a good deal;
that's the way of friends."

The bird said:

4 "I will choose a temple,
many altars,
and golden-horned cows
from the king's household,
if what I say brings Sigerlinn
to sleep in his arms,
if that woman
marries him of her free will."

This was before Atli's journey to King Svafnir. When Atli came home, King Hjorvarth asked him his news, and Atli said:

5 "We had trouble,
the errand was not accomplished.
We wore out our horses
on the high mountains,
and then we had to wade
the river Saemorn.
And then Svafnir's
ring-decked daughter,
the girl we went there to get,
was denied to us."

King Hjorvarth asked them to go a second time, and he went along himself this time. And when they went up on a mountain, they saw wildfires burning in Svavaland, and they saw huge clouds of dust kicked up by horses' hooves. Then the king rode down from the mountain and spent the night by a river. Atli stood on guard, and he went over the river. There he found a house. A large bird sat on the house and kept watch, but it had fallen asleep. Atli threw a spear at the bird and killed it.

In the house, Atli found Sigerlinn, the daughter of King Svafnir, and Alof, the daughter of Jarl Franmar, and he took them away from there.

Hrothmar, another king who had courted Sigerlinn, had killed King Svafnir and then burned and robbed the country. Jarl Franmar had turned himself into an eagle, and he had been guarding the women with his magic.

King Hjorvarth married Sigerlinn, and Atli married Alof.

Hjorvarth and Sigerlinn had a big, handsome son. He was quiet, and no name suited him for long.

One day the boy sat on a mound, and he saw nine Valkyries riding, and one of them stood out from the others. She said:

6 "It will be a while,
Helgi, before you rule
the golden rings
and the lands of Rothulsvellir.
Even though you're always silent,
a young eagle will cry
on the battlefield after you—
you'll show your courage, warrior."

Helgi said:

7 "You named me Helgi—
what gift will you give
to accompany my name-giving,
you lovely woman?
I think you know
what everyone's names are.
But I will not accept my name,
unless I get you as a gift along with it."

The Valkyrie said:

8 "I know where there lie
forty-six
swords
in Sigarsholm.
But one of those
shield-breaking blades
is better than the others;
it's decked with gold.

9 "There's a ring in the hilt,
and courage in its middle,
and there's fear in its point—
fear of the man who wields it.
A blood-colored serpent
decorates the blade;
another serpent bites its tail
on the hilt's hand-guard."

A king was named Eylimi; he had a daughter named Svava. She was a Valkyrie who rode on the waves and winds. It was she who gave Helgi his name, and who defended him in many battles afterwards.

Helgi said:

10 "Hjorvarth, you are not
a wise king,
not a good leader of men,
though you are wise enough.
You've burned the halls
of other kings,
who had given you
no provocation.

11 "But Hrothmar
will come to power,
and own the rings
our people have owned.
That man fears no one
in this life; he thinks
he'll own our inheritance
when we're all dead."

Hjorvarth said he would let Helgi have an army, if Helgi would avenge his mother's father, King Svafnir. Then Helgi found the sword Svava had told him about, and he and Atli went and killed Hrothmar and did many other great warlike deeds.

Helgi killed the giant Hati where he sat on a hill. Then Helgi and Atli anchored their ships in Hati's Fjord. Atli stood watch during the first part of the night. Then Hrimgerth, the daughter of Hati, said:

12 "Who are you men
in Hati's Fjord?
Your ships are decked
with shields.
You speak boldly;
I think you fear nothing—
tell me the name of your king."

Atli said:

13 "He is named Helgi,
but you can't do any harm
to that fierce man.
There are iron ships
in his fleet; they're too tough
even for a giant woman."

14 "What are you named,"
asked Hrimgerth, "you strong man?
What do people call you?
Your king must trust you,
since he lets you
stand on the fair ship's prow."

15 "I am named Atli,
and I will be fierce against you;
I have great hate of giant women.
I've often stood
on a ship's wet prow,
I've often killed witch women.

16 "And what are you called,
you corpse-hungry sorceress,
you monster? Name your father, too.
You ought to be lying
nine miles below the earth,
with a tree's roots in you."

17 "I am named Hrimgerth,
and my father is Hati,
who I think is the greatest of giants.
He had many women,
all stolen from their homes,
before Helgi killed him."

18 "Witch, you've been here
by the king's ships,
you've waited in the fjord's mouth.
You were meaning
to give the king's men to Ran,
if their spears didn't kill you first."

19 "I think you've been
deluded by a dream, Atli:
I see your eyelashes sunk low.
My mother lay in wait
for the king's ships, and I
drowned Hlothvarth's sons in the sea.

20 "And now you would shout, Atli,
if you weren't a gelding—
now I, Hrimgerth, stretch out my neck.
You have a coward's heart,
Atli, though I think
you have a handsome voice."

21 "A gelding? You'll think I'm
a stallion if you get to try me,
if I come ashore from my ship.
You'll have all your bones
broken, if I carry out my threats—
I'll hang you by your neck, Hrimgerth."

22 "Come to land, Atli,
if you have the courage,
and we'll meet in Varin's bay.
I'll straighten out
your ribs, boy,
if you come within my grasp."

23 "I won't leave
till the men wake,
and take over the watch for the king.
I can't be sure
when you'll come
to attack our ship, you monster."

24 "Wake, Helgi!"
said Hrimgerth. "Pay me back
for when you killed my father—
sleep at my side
for one night,
and I'll consider the debt paid."

25 Helgi said, "Only a hairy beast
would take you, you're too ugly.
But a giant, a very wise giant,
the worst kind of lava-monster,
lives in Tholley,
and he'd be a good match for you."

26 Hrimgerth said, "Helgi,
you'd rather have Svava,
who ruled the sea last night—
that sparkling sea
seemed stronger than I am.
Here the land rises from the sea
and holds your fleet,
and she alone
is the reason
I couldn't kill your men."

27 "Hear me, Hrimgerth," said Helgi.
"If I'm going to compensate you
for your father, tell me more:
Was it just one lady
who saved my ships,
or were there more of them?"

28 "There were twenty-seven,
though one rode before them all,
a beautiful lady wearing a helmet.
Their mares were stirred up,
dew dripped from their manes
into the deep trenches,
like hail upon the high trees
when the year turns;
I hated all this as I saw it."

29 "Look to the east now, Hrimgerth!
I, Helgi, have
kept you talking till your death.
My fleet is saved
on land and on sea,
and my men are spared your terrors."

30 "It's morning, Hrimgerth!
I, Atli, have
kept you talking till your death.
Now you'll become
just a ridiculous
standing stone in the sea."

King Helgi was a great warrior. He came to King Eylimi and asked for the hand of his daughter Svava. Helgi and Svava swore their faithfulness to one another, and they loved each other very much. Svava stayed at home with her father, and Helgi went out on raids. Svava was still a Valkyrie, as she had been before.

Helgi's half-brother Hethin also stayed at home with their father, King Hjorvarth, in Norway.

One time Hethin was away from home alone on a winter evening, and he met a giant woman. She was riding a wolf, and she was using snakes as reins. She offered to accompany Hethin.

He refused her, and she said, "You'll repay this at the feast, when you make your oaths."

That evening there was a feast, and oaths were sworn. A big boar was brought in, and men laid their hands on it and swore oaths as they drank. Hethin swore that he would take Svava, daughter of Eylimi, his brother Helgi's lover, but later he regretted this oath so much that he wandered wild roads to the south alone, and eventually he met his brother Helgi. Helgi said:

31 "Greetings, Hethin!
What news
can you tell me
from Norway?
Young ruler,
why are you in exile?
Why have you come alone
to seek me?"

32 "A much greater
misfortune has befallen me:
I swore to take
your noble-born
bride, when I made
my oath at the feast."

33 "Don't concern yourself,
Hethin; the oaths
men make while drinking
will always prove true.
A king has challenged me
to a duel, and before three nights
have passed, I must meet him
at the appointed place.
I doubt that I
will survive;
and then it would be good,
if you took Svava."

34 "Are you saying, Helgi,
that I still deserve
your good will,
and gifts from you?

It would be more befitting
if you bloodied your sword
in me, than if you gave
your enemy peace."

Helgi spoke as he did because he suspected he was doomed, and that the troll-woman that Hethin had seen riding the wolf was in fact Helgi's own guardian spirit, and she had caused Hethin to speak as he had.

There was a king named Alf, son of Hrothmar, and it was he who had challenged Helgi to meet him for a duel on Sigarsvellir before three nights had passed. Then Helgi said:

35 "That dark
giant woman
rode a wolf,
she offered to go with Hethin—
she knew that I,
Sigerlinn's son,
would be slain
on Sigarsvellir."

Then there was a great battle, and Helgi was mortally wounded.

36 Helgi sent
Sigar to ride
to Svava,
Eylimi's daughter—
he said to tell her
to make haste,
if she wanted to see
Helgi alive.

37 Sigar said,
"Helgi sent me
to you, Svava,
he gave me a message.
That warrior wants
to see you again,
before the noble man
falls dead of his wounds."

38 Svava said,
"What has happened

to Helgi, son of Hjorvarth?
This is a terrible sorrow for me.
But whether he drowned in the sea,
or was torn by a sword,
I'll pay this back in full
to the man who caused it."

39 Sigar said, "Helgi,
the best king under the sun,
fell this morning
at Frekastein.
Alf has
total victory,
although it didn't
have to end this way."

40 Helgi said,
"Welcome, Svava,
this will be our last
meeting in life.
Spread a blanket
beneath my body;
a sword has come
too near my heart.

41 "I ask you,
Svava, my bride,
if you will heed
my dying words—
that you will sleep
by Hethin,
that you will love
my young brother."

42 Svava said,
"Helgi, when you
gave me rings,
I said this:
I said I would never
willingly in my life

put my arms around
another man, if you died."

43 "Kiss me, Svava,"
said Hethin.
"I won't ever return
to Rogheim or Rothulsfjoll,
before I've avenged
Helgi, Hjorvarth's son.
That man was the best
beneath the sun."

It is said that Helgi and Svava were reincarnated.

Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I
(The First Poem of Helgi, Killer of Hunding)

The Helgi of the next two poems is the son of the hero Sigmund and his wife Borghild. This, the first of these two poems, begins with Helgi's birth, which is attended by the Norns (goddess-like figures who determine fate). The Norns predict Helgi will be famous and rule a wide kingdom; a raven also predicts his success as a warrior. Helgi lives up to these expectations and kills King Hunding while he is still only fifteen years old. He refuses to compensate Hunding's sons for their father's loss, and he kills them in a subsequent battle.

After this battle, he sees Valkyries in the sky, and he desires Sigrun, their leader. She tells him, however, that she has been promised by her father Hogni to marry King Hothbrodd. She asks Helgi to fight him for her hand in marriage, which Helgi eagerly agrees to do. He sails with a great navy to do battle with Hothbrodd. Upon arriving at his kingdom, Hothbrodd's brother Guthmund interrogates them from the shore, and becomes embroiled in an exchange of insults with Helgi's half-brother Sinfjotli (this exchange comprises st. 32–44). Helgi finally stops the banter by entreating them to fight with weapons like men. Helgi and Sinfjotli win the ensuing battle, and Sigrun congratulates Helgi, telling him he has won Hothbrodd's lands as well as her hand in marriage.

Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I

Here begins the poem of the Volsungs, the poem about Helgi, the killer of Hunding and Hothbrodd:

1 It was in ancient days
when eagles cried,
and holy waters fell
from the mountains of heaven.
Then Helgi,
the bold man,
was born to Borghild
in Bralund.

2 It was night in the house
when the Norns came in,
the ones who make fate
for the noble-born.
They said the boy
would be a very famous king,
he would be considered
the best of all rulers.

3 They decided his fate
with their power,
when they broke the walls
of Bralund.
They had bands
made of gold;
they laid them down
under the night-time sky.

4 They hid their ends
in the east and west,
to show the borders
of the lands this king would rule.
One of the Norns
hid the third end
in the north; she said
it would hold forever.

5 One thing grieved
Sigmund, Helgi's father,
and his wife
Borghild, Helgi's mother.
One raven said
to another raven,
expecting a feast:
"I know something:

6 "Sigmund's young son
will wear armor!
He's just a day old;
his first day has just dawned.
But he has sharp eyes

like a war-king;
that boy's a friend of wolves—
we'll be happy and well-fed!"

7 The boy grew up
and was warlike at a young age;
they said he was already
reckoned as a man.
King Sigmund himself
returned from battle
to give the young prince
a worthy sword.

8 Sigmund named him Helgi,
and gave him lands—
Solfjoll, Snofjoll,
Sigarsvellir, Hringstath,
Hringstoth, Hatun,
and Himinvangar—
young Helgi
held a ready sword.

9 Then the young king
began to grow up,
a noble tree
in the company of his kinsmen.
He paid his men
in gold—he was no miser
with the loot
from his campaigns.

10 He did not have long
to wait for battle.
When the young man
was just fifteen years old,
he killed the brave
King Hunding,
who had ruled lands
and men a long time.

11 But the sons of Hunding
sent him a message,
they demanded compensation
in the form of money.
They had much to avenge—
Helgi had killed their father,
and taken
much wealth.

12 Helgi paid them
nothing of what they asked;
he would not compensate them
for the loss of their father.
Instead he called for
stormy weather,
for a rain of gray spears
and the wrath of Odin.

13 Those kings
rode to battle;
the battle was held
at Logafjoll.
They broke the peace
of King Frothi's time;
Odin's wolves
did not go hungry.

14 Helgi rested
after he killed them
beneath Arastein—
Alf and Eyjolf,
Hjorvarth and Havarth,
all the sons of Hunding.
He destroyed the whole
family of that warrior.

15 Then light shone
from Logafjoll,
and in those lights
he saw lightning.
He saw Valkyries

wearing helmets
in the high heavens;
their armor was bloody,
and banners waved
from their spears.

16 Right away
King Helgi asked
those armed women,
those southern Valkyries,
if they would go home
with the warriors
that night.
Battle raged all around.

17 And Sigrun,
daughter of Hogni,
said to that king from her horse
as the battle died down:
"I think we have
other business
than drinking beer
with warriors tonight.

18 "My father
promised me
to Hothbrodd,
the grim son of Granmar.
But I tell you, Helgi,
I said to that good king
that he seemed no better
to me than a tomcat.

19 "Now he will come
for me in a few short nights,
unless you
invite him to battle,
or take me by force
from my father."

20 Helgi said, "Do not fear
for Helgi, enemy of Hothbrodd!
There will be a battle
before I fall dead."

21 King Helgi
sent messages
by air and sea
to summon an army.
He promised
his men and their sons
that there was plenty
of gold to be won.

22 He said, "Tell my men
to go straight to their ships,
be ready to sail
out of Brandey!"
The king waited there
till hundreds of men
came to him
from Hethinsey.

23 His own ships
left their moorings
at the docks of
Stafnsnes, decked with gold.
Helgi asked
Hjorleif then:
"Have you taken count
of our brave men?"

24 Hjorleif said
to Helgi,
after he began to count
the serpent-headed
ships out of Tronueyri
and the men on them,
as they entered
Orvasund:

25 "I count one-thousand,
four hundred and forty trusty men,
and still twice as many
of the king's men
are in Hatun.
I expect a battle."

26 The captain
drew the covers back,
woke up
the king's men
on board
to see the dawning sun,
and the kings
hoisted up
their sails
in Varinsfjord.

27 Eagles cried,
and swords clashed,
shield struck shield,
Vikings rowed.
That fleet
of kings
traveled swiftly
far from land.

28 It was like hearing
the hills, or the ocean
breaking apart,
to hear the waves
breaking against
those long ships' keels.

29 Helgi commanded them
to raise the sails yet higher;
the waves
of the storm
would not swallow them,
though the shipwreck-god's

daughters might try
to drown the ships.

30 But bold Sigrun
protected them,
she flew above
their danger.
With the strength
of Ran in her hand,
she saved the ships
at Gnipalund.

31 The fleet of
beautiful ships
moored in the evening
at Unavagir,
and then the people
of Svarinshaug
could count their enemies
with worry in their thoughts.

32 Among them,
half-god Guthmund asked:
"Who is the king
who leads this army
and directs this force
against our land?"

33 Sinfjotli, Helgi's brother,
spoke up from his ship
with a red battle-shield
rimmed with gold.
He was a leader of men,
who knew how to answer
and exchange words
with noble men:

34 "Tonight, when you feed
your pigs, when you throw
some food in your dogs' bowls,
tell them this:

The Volsungs have come
from out of the east,
eager warriors
from Gnipalund.

35 "In the middle of the fleet,
Hothbrodd will find
Helgi, a warrior
who is reluctant to flee.
He is a man
who has often fed eagles
while you sat on millstones
kissing slavegirls."

36 Guthmund said, "My lord,
you don't know much
about old stories, if you
mock noble-born men with lies.
You have eaten
dead men's flesh,
you have killed
your own brothers,
your cold mouth
has often sucked wounds—
you've lived, hated by everyone,
in a stone pile."

37 Sinfjotli said, "You were
a witch-woman on Varinsey,
a crafty woman,
a teller of lies,
you said
you would never
accept any man as husband—
except me.

38 "You liar,
you were a Valkyrie—
a fierce, foul female
in Odin's service.
You self-righteous woman,

you wanted all the men
in Valhalla
to fight over you.

39 "You and I had
nine wolf-children
on Sagunes;
I was the father of them all."

40 Guthmund said,
"You weren't father
to any wolves,
you're older than all of them;
and I remember when
some giant women
castrated you
at Gnipalund on Thorsnes.

41 "You were Siggeir's stepson,
you slept in the straw at home,
you were used to hearing
wolves cry in the woods outside.
All your misfortune
came to you
when you cut open the chests
of your brothers;
you've won a famous name
for your evil deeds."

42 Sinfjotli said, "You were
the mare of the stallion Grani at Bravoll,
you wore a gold bit,
and you were used for racing.
I've often ridden on you
on downhill races—
you were a tired, skinny mare,
a troll beneath my saddle.

43 "No one thought you
were any kind of man
when you milked

the goats of Gullnir,
or when you were
the daughter of Imd,
wearing a ratty dress.
Should I say any more?"

44 Guthmund said,
"I would rather feed
your carcass to the ravens
at Frekastein
than feed your pigs,
or throw food
in your dogs' bowls.
Let's exchange sword-blows."

45 Helgi said,
"It would be better
for both of you, Sinfjotli,
to fight, to feed flesh to the eagles,
than to exchange
these pointless words,
even if you hate
each other so immensely.

46 "Granmar's sons
seem no good to me,
but it's appropriate
for nobles to speak truth only.
They showed us
at Moinsheim
that they have the courage
to draw swords."

47 Guthmund and his brothers
rode their horses,
named Sviputh and Sveggjuth,
to Solheimar,
over valleys wet with dew,
over dark hillsides;
the earth shook
where the men rode.

48 They met Hothbrodd
at his gate,
they said that Helgi
had come to bring war.
Hothbrodd was there
with a helmet on his head,
he wondered about
the way his brother was riding.
He asked, "Why have you come
with this worried expression?"

49 Guthmund said,
"Swift ships are here,
sailing ships with
long oars,
carven oars
and many shields,
a great army of kings,
the valorous Volsungs.

50 "Fifteen armies
are coming up on land;
eight thousand, four hundred
are still out in Sogn.
Blue-black ships,
decorated with gold,
lie at anchor at the gates
of Gnipalund.
That's where the biggest part
of their armed force is.
Now Helgi will strike
without delay."

51 Hothbrodd said,
"Let our saddled horses
run to the battle;
let Sporvitnar run to
Sparinsheith,
and Melnir and Mylnir
to Mirkwood.
Let no man

who can draw a sword
stay behind.

52 "We'll invite Hogni
and the sons of Hring,
Atli and Yngvi,
and Alf the Old,
the ones who are
eager for battle,
we'll show strong resistance
to the Volsungs."

53 There was a storm there
when the pale spears
started to fly
at Frekastein.
Helgi,
the killer of Hunding,
was always at the front
when men were fighting.
He was always at the front,
he never thought of fleeing—
that warrior
had a hard heart.

54 Then the Valkyries
came down from heaven,
they defended their princes,
the roar of war grew greater.
Then Sigrun, the flying
Valkyrie, spoke
as the wolves
began to tear the fallen:

55 "Hail to you, Helgi,
son of Volsungs—
enjoy these victories,
and live well
now that you
have killed

that unfleeing prince
who killed another.

56 "Now it's fitting for you,
King, to take the
golden rings, and take me
to be your powerful wife.
Hail to you, King,
enjoy both
the daughter of Hogni
and the lands of Hringstath,
both the victory and the lands.
Now the battle is done."

Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II
(The Second Poem of Helgi, Killer of Hunding)

The second of the two poems about Helgi Sigmundsson tells a more complete version of his life, and this includes retelling some events from the first poem. The poem moves swiftly between scenes and can be rather confusing; a summary is called for to ground readers in the basic characters and action of the poem.

Helgi, son of King Sigmund, is fostered by King Hagal. Helgi disguises himself as Hagal's son Hamal and goes to spy on his father's enemy King Hunding. After Helgi's true identity is revealed, he flees back to Hagal. Hunding sends men, including a follower named Blind, to search for him at Hagal's, but Helgi disguises himself as a slavewoman. Blind notices that this "slavewoman" has unusually fierce eyes, to which Hagal responds that she is a captured Valkyrie. This ruse allows Helgi to escape capture.

Helgi later kills Hunding, and soon thereafter he meets the Valkyrie Sigrun. He pretends to be Hamal once again, but Sigrun recognizes him for who he really is. She tells him that she has been promised by her father Hogni to marry King Hothbrodd, and she asks Helgi to fight Hothbrodd for her hand in marriage.

Helgi sails with a great navy to do battle with Hothbrodd. Upon arriving at his kingdom, Hothbrodd's brother Guthmund interrogates them from the shore, and becomes embroiled in an exchange of insults with Helgi's half-brother Sinfjotli. Helgi finally stops the banter by urging them to fight with weapons like men. In the ensuing battle, Helgi kills Hothbrodd as well as many of Hothbrodd's allies, including his lover Sigrun's own father and her brother Bragi, though he spares her brother Dag. Helgi and Sigrun are married.

Dag, however, cannot bear to see the killer of his father and brothers alive, and he kills his brother-in-law Helgi with a spear he has borrowed from Odin. The fallen Helgi goes to Valhalla, but returns to his burial mound one night and sleeps with his wife Sigrun there. After his return to Valhalla, Sigrun continues to wait for him but he never comes back, and she dies in her sorrow.

Yet another reincarnation of Helgi is mentioned in the prose note at the end of the poem, with an allusion to a poem called the "Song of Kara." This poem is now lost.

Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II

King Sigmund, son of Volsung, was married to Borghild from Bralund. They named their son Helgi, after Helgi Hjorvarthsson. Hagal fostered Helgi.

There was a powerful king named Hunding; Hundland is named for him. He was a great warrior, and he had many sons who went on raids. There was no peace between King Hunding and King Sigmund, and they feuded. They each killed one another's kinsmen.

King Sigmund and his kinsmen were called the Volsungs and the Ylfings. Helgi went to the court of King Hunding and spied on him in secret. Heming, the son of King Hunding, was at home. And when Helgi left, he encountered a man named Hjarthar, and Helgi said:

1 "Tell Heming
that I remember
when the armor-clad warriors
killed one another.
You had a gray wolf
within your doors,
though King Hunding
thought it was Hamal."

Hamal was the name of a son of Hagal. King Hunding sent men to Hagal to search for Helgi, and Helgi could not save himself in any other way than by putting on a slavewoman's dress and grinding grain. So they searched for Helgi and did not find him. Then Blind the Crafty said:

2 "Hagal has a
sharp-eyed slavewoman!
That's no commoner's daughter
who's grinding the grain.
She's splitting the stones,
she's making the grain-basket shake.

3 "Now you, crafty young prince,
must have fallen on hard times,
when you're the one
who has to grind the grain.
It would befit you better

if your hand
held a sword-hilt
rather than a grindstone."

Hagal answered:

4 "It's not much danger
if the grain-basket shakes
when my slavegirl
moves it.
I saw her walking
above the clouds,
and she dared to fight
like a Viking
before Helgi
put her in chains.
She's a sister
of Sigar and Hogni—
that's why this slavegirl
of the Ylfings has fierce eyes."

Helgi escaped and got away on a warship. He killed King Hunding, and afterwards he was called Helgi Hunding-Killer. He went with his army to Brunavagar and raided the beach there and ate raw meat.

Hogni was the name of a king. His daughter was named Sigrun. She was a Valkyrie and rode over wind and sea. She was the reincarnation of Svava. Sigrun rode up to Helgi's ships and said:

5 "Who commands
these ships at this shore?
Warriors, where do you
call home?
What do you want
in Brunavagar?
Where have you thought
to go afterwards?"

6 "I am named Hamal,"
said Helgi, "and I
command these ships.
We come from Hlesey.
What we want in Brunavagar

is a good breeze;
we mean to sail east
from this place."

7 Sigrun said, "King,
where have you fought battles?
Where have you set
a table for the ravens?
Why is your armor
blood-soaked?
Why are you helmeted warriors
eating raw meat?"

8 Helgi said, "The latest news
of what I, an Ylfing,
have done west of the sea,
if you really want to know, is this—
I fought bear-like men
in Bragalund,
I fed the eagles' nestlings
with the point of my spear.

9 "Now, lady, I've told
the story of how
I came to eat raw meat
on my ship."

10 "You speak of war,"
said Sigrun, "And I know
it was Helgi who caused
the fall of King Hunding.
There was a battle then,
you both avenged kinsmen,
and blood ran freely
on the sword-blades."

11 "How do you know,"
said Helgi, "wise lady,
that it was Hunding and I
who had kinsmen to avenge?
There are many fierce

sons of kings
who are not unlike
me and my kinsmen."

12 Sigrun said, "War-maker,
I was not far away
from that killing place
yesterday morning.
But I think you're wise,
Helgi, son of Sigmund,
since you speak
of your deeds in riddles.

13 "I sought you once before,
on your longships,
when you stood on
bloody prows
amid the rolling
cool waves.
Now you want
to conceal your name,
but I am Hogni's daughter—
I recognize Helgi."

Granmar was the name of a powerful king who lived at Svarinshaug. He had many sons: The first was named Hothbrodd, the second Guthmund, the third Starkath.

Hothbrodd met with other kings, and Sigrun, daughter of King Hogni, was promised to him. And when she learned this, she rode off with her Valkyries over air and sea to find Helgi. At the time, Helgi was at Logafjoll, where he had fought against the sons of Hunding. He killed Alf and Eyjolf there, as well as Hjorvarth and Havarth. He was in an extreme battle-rage and sat beneath the Eagle-Stone. There Sigrun found him, and she ran into his arms and kissed him and told him her errand, as it is told in the Ancient Poem of the Volsungs:

14 Sigrun sought
the glad king,
she sought
the king's hand in her own.
She kissed that helmeted king

and greeted him,
and Helgi
took a liking to her.

15 She said
that she'd loved Helgi
with all her heart
before she had even seen him.

16 "I was promised," she said,
"to Hothbrodd, but there is
another king
I would rather have.
Warrior, I fear
my father's anger,
but I have disobeyed him
regardless."

17 Sigrun did not speak
of her own love,
but she said she wanted
Helgi's love.

18 Helgi said, "Pay no mind
to your father's anger,
nor to the ill will
of your kinsmen.
Young lady, you will
live with me!
Good lady, I do not fear
your family."

Then Helgi gathered a great navy and sailed to Frekastein, and on this journey they encountered very dangerous weather. There was continual lightning, and it even glowed on the ships. Helgi and his men saw nine Valkyries riding in the air, and they recognized Sigrun. Then the storm abated, and they came safely to land. The sons of Granmar were sitting on a certain hill when the ships sailed up to land. Guthmund leapt up on his horse and rode up to the top of a hill near the harbor. Then the Volsungs took their sails down.

Guthmund, son of Granmar, said:

19 "Who is the leader
of this navy?
Who lowers the golden sail
upon the prow?
I don't think
we can expect peace
from this navy; I see
a red battle-flag and Vikings."

Sinfjotli said:

20 "I think Hothbrodd
will recognize Helgi here,
in the middle of the fleet—
he hates to retreat.
He has taken
the ancestral lands
of your people the Fjorsungs,
he's stolen your inheritance."

21 Guthmund said, "First,
we should settle
our differences
at Frekastein.
Hothbrodd! It's time
to get vengeance.
For a long time
we've been losing battles."

22 Sinfjotli said, "First,
Guthmund, you'll need
to watch your goats
and climb the steep cliffs.
Keep a wooden club
in your hand,
you'll do better
as a shepherd than a fighter."

23 Helgi said, "Sinfjotli,
it would be more honorable
to make war,

to cheer the eagles,
than to exchange
pointless words,
even if you
hate one another.

24 "I have no love
for Granmar's sons,
but it's better
for noble men not to lie.
We have seen
at Moinsheimar
that they have the courage
to draw swords;
these warriors
are wise and brave."

Guthmund rode home and reported on the hostilities. Then the sons of Granmar assembled an army; many kings came to them. Hogni, the father of Sigrun, was there, along with his sons, Bragi and Dag. There was a great battle, and all the sons of Granmar fell as well as all the other chieftains, except Dag, who was granted mercy and who swore an oath to the Volsungs. Sigrun went out on the battlefield afterwards and found Hothbrodd dying. She said:

25 "King Hothbrodd,
I, Sigrun from Sefafjoll,
will not kneel
to embrace you in my arms.
Your life is over,
the wolves
will get plenty of
your and your brothers' flesh."

Then she found Helgi, and she was glad. Helgi said:

26 "Wise woman,
not everything
has gone as you'd wish.
The Norns have some blame.
Bragi and Hogni
fell today

at Frekastein,
and I was their killer.

27 "And I killed Starkath
at Styrkleif
and the sons of Hrollaug
at Hlebjargir.
I saw the most warlike
of all kings
fighting without his arms,
and soon without his head.

28 "Most of your family
lies on the battlefield,
they've become
cold corpses.
You could not stop
that battle;
you were destined
to cause kings to clash."

Then Sigrun wept. Helgi spoke once more:

29 "Be comforted, Sigrun.
You've been like Hild to us;
and not even kings can fight fate."
Sigrun said, "Let all my family
fall in battle, if that means
I can sleep in your arms."

Helgi married Sigrun, and they had sons. Helgi was not an old man.

Dag, son of Hogni, sacrified to Odin for vengeance for his father. Odin loaned Dag his own spear. Dag encountered Helgi, his brother-in-law, at the place called Fjoturlund. Dag ran Helgi through with the spear. Helgi fell there, and then Dag rode to the mountains and told Sigrun the news:

30 "Sister, I regret
to tell you this hard news.
I have been forced
to make my own sister weep.
That king who was

the best in all the world,
who stood on the necks
of many fallen enemies,
fell today in battle
at Fjoturlund."

31 Sigrun said, "All your oaths,
the oaths you swore
to Helgi,
the oaths you swore
by the sea,
and by the cool stone
of Unn,
will come back to bite you.

32 "A ship will not sail
if you are on it,
even if it has
the most favorable of winds.
A horse will not run
if you are on it,
even if it could save you
from pursuing enemies.

33 "No sword you draw
will cut,
unless it cuts
your own head off.
I would only
be avenged for Helgi's death
if you were an outlaw
living in the woods,
deprived of all your property
and all joy.
You wouldn't even eat—
unless you caught your own raw meat."

Dag said:

34 "You are mad, sister,
you are out of your wits,
when you speak such curses

against your own brother.
Odin alone
causes all evil,
he's the one
who causes war between kin.

35 "I will offer you
golden rings,
I will offer you the lands of
Vandilsve and Vigdalir.
You and your children,
well-dressed lady,
will own half my home
in compensation for your loss."

36 Sigrun said, "I will never
be so happy at my home
in the day or in the night
that I will love life,
unless I see that king
and his army,
unless I see Helgi
riding his horse Vigblaer
with a golden bridle—
I would greet him gladly.

37 "My husband Helgi
has frightened
all his enemies so much
and all his kinsmen,
that they are like
trembling goats
fleeing a wolf
on a mountainside.

38 "Helgi is as high
above other kings
as a noble ash tree
above a thorn,
he is like a young stag
coated in morning dew,

higher than
all other beasts,
with his horns glowing
against the heavens."

A burial mound was made for Helgi. And when he came to Valhalla, Odin asked him to help him rule everything. Helgi said:

39 "Hunding, you will be
a foot-washer
and fire-starter,
a dog-walker
and a horse's groom
for every man in Valhalla.
And don't forget to feed the pigs
before you go to sleep."

One of Sigrun's serving-women walked during the evening near Helgi's burial mound, and she saw Helgi riding toward the mound with a large following of men. The serving-woman said:

40 "Is this an illusion
that I see before me,
or has Ragnarok come?
I see dead men riding,
I see them driving
their horses with spurs.
Have dead kings been given leave
to come home from Valhalla?"

41 Helgi said, "True,
you see us here,
driving
our horses with spurs,
and it is no illusion,
nor is it Ragnarok,
and neither do we have leave
to come home from Valhalla."

The serving-woman went home and said to Sigrun:

42 "Go out from your home,
Sigrun, if you want
to see your

king again!
His burial mound is open,
Helgi has come back,
his wounds are bleeding.
That lord of men
asks that you come
and see to his injuries."

Sigrun went inside Helgi's burial mound and she said:

43 "Now I am as happy
to see you, husband,
as Odin's eager
ravens are
when they see
fresh, warm corpses,
or when, dew-covered,
they greet the morning.

44 "I want to kiss you,
my unliving king,
before you take your
bloody armor off.
There's frost frozen
in your hair, Helgi,
there's blood all over
your body, my king.
Your hands are wet with
the cold blood of Hogni's kin.
My lord, how shall I
heal you of these things?"

45 Helgi said, "You alone,
Sigrun from Sefafjoll,
caused the sad death
of your father Hogni.
Gold-adorned southern woman,
fairer than the sun,
you wept bitter tears
before you went to sleep;
each tear fell bloody
over your fierce heart,

cold, wet, bloody, burning,
twisted with sorrow.

46 "But I can drink
happily of Odin's good mead
even if I have lost
my lands and my love.
No one will sing
a sorrowful song for me,
even if I have
wounds on my chest—
for my wife Sigrun
is in my mound,
the Valkyrie lies
by me, though I am dead."

Sigrun climbed into his bed in the mound.

47 Sigrun said, "Helgi,
of Ylfing kin, I offer you
untroubled rest
in this place.
I want to sleep
in your embrace,
as I would in the arms
of a living husband."

48 Helgi said, "Now
I can foresee everything.
You will sleep,
lovely lady,
daughter of Hogni,
tonight and tomorrow morning
in the arms of a dead man
in his mound—
and yet you are alive,
noble lady.

49 "Yet still I must
ride the warpath,
take my pale horse
back to Valhalla.

I have to be
west of Bifrost
before the rooster
wakes the men in Odin's hall."

Helgi and his men rode their way, and Sigrun and her serving-women returned to her home. The next evening Sigrun had a serving-woman keep watch on Helgi's burial mound. And when Sigrun returned to the mound at sunset, she said:

50 "My husband,
the son of Sigmund,
would have come back
from Odin's hall, if he could.
But I expect
there is little chance
of his return
when eagles sleep in the trees,
and all the people
are dreaming."

51 A serving-woman said,
"Do not be so foolish
that you go alone
to his burial mound.
All the dead
are more powerful
at night than they are
during bright day."

Sigrun did not live long, because of her sorrow and indifference to life. It was generally believed in ancient times that people were reborn, though this is now called a superstition. Helgi and Sigrun are said to have been reborn. He was then called Helgi, the Sorrow of Hadding, and she was called Kara, Daughter of Halfdan, and she was a Valkyrie, as is told in the Song of Kara.

Fra dautha Sinfjotla (The Death of Sinfjotli)

The poems in the Sigurth tradition begin with a prose piece called *Fra dautha Sinfjotla,* "Concerning the Death of Sinfjotli," who is Sigurth's half-brother by their father Sigmund. The ferryman who takes Sinfjotli's body away is probably Odin, who takes a great interest in the fortune of Sigurth's family, the Volsungs (also compare Odin's appearance as a ferryman in *Harbarthsljoth*).

Fra dautha Sinfjotla

Sigmund, son of Volsung, was a king of the Franks. Sinfjotli was his oldest son, and the second was named Helgi, the third Hamund.

Borghild, Sigmund's wife, had a brother. Her stepson Sinfjotli and her brother both wooed the same woman, and because of this, Sinfjotli killed her brother. When Sinfjotli came home, Borghild told him to leave, but Sigmund offered her compensation for her brother's death, and she was forced to accept this.

At the funeral for her brother, Borghild was serving beer. She took a large horn full of poison and served it to Sinfjotli. When he looked inside the horn, he saw that there was poison in it and said to his father: "This drink is cloudy, father!" Sigmund took the horn and drank everything in it; it is said that Sigmund was so hardy that he was impervious to poison, whether by skin contact or by drinking it. But his sons were impervious only by skin, not internally.

Borghild brought another hornful to Sinfjotli and told him to drink from it, but it went exactly as before. And then she brought him the horn for a third time, and she mocked him for not wanting to drink from it. Sinfjotli spoke as he had before to his father, but Sigmund said: "Wet your mustache, son!" Sinfjotli drank and fell dead immediately.

Sigmund carried Sinfjotli's body in his arms for a long time, till he came to a long, narrow fjord, where he saw a little boat and a man standing on it, who offered to ferry Sigmund over the fjord. But when Sigmund put the body of his son on the boat, the ferry was full, and the ferryman said that Sigmund would need to walk around the fjord. Then he shoved off from shore and disappeared.

King Sigmund remained for a long time in Denmark, in Borghild's kingdom, after he was married to her. But then Sigmund

returned to the kingdom he had in France, and there he married Hjordis, daughter of King Eylimi, and their son was Sigurth. King Sigmund fell in a battle against Hunding's sons, and after that Hjordis remarried to Alf, son of King Hjalprek. Sigurth grew up with him while still a boy.

Sigmund and all his sons were far better than other men in strength and height, in courage, and in all achievements, but Sigurth was the greatest of all, and in the old sagas people say that he was greater than all other men, and that he was the noblest of all warrior kings.

Gripisspa (Gripir's Prophecies to Sigurth)

The first poem about Sigurth is *Gripisspa* ("Gripir's Prophecies"), in which Sigurth's future is foretold to him by his uncle Gripir. Modern readers should be warned that the medieval attitude toward "spoilers" was more accepting than that of modern audiences; much of the action of Sigurth's later life (as related in the following poems) is revealed here.

Gripisspa

Gripir was the brother of Hjordis, Sigurth's mother; they were the children of Eylimi. Gripir was a wiser ruler than all others, and he could see the future. Sigurth rode to Gripir's hall alone. Sigurth was easy to recognize. He met a man named Geitir outside the hall and spoke with him. Sigurth greeted him and said:

1 "WHO IS IT WHO LIVES
in this place?
What name do men
give to their king here?

Geitir said:

"Gripir is the name
of the leader of men
who rules this strong land
and all its legions."

Sigurth said:

2 "Is the wise king
home right now?
Do you think he will
talk to me?
I'm a stranger
who wants to speak with him.
I must meet
with Gripir soon."

Geitir said:

3 "But the noble king
will ask me what the name
of this stranger is
who wants to talk to him."

Sigurth said:

"I am called Sigurth,
son of Sigmund,
and Hjordis
was my mother."

4 Then Geitir went
to Gripir and said:
"A stranger
has come here.
He is an impressive
man to look at,
and, my lord,
he wants to talk to you."

5 The great king
left his hall,
and greeted
his visitor well:
"Welcome, Sigurth!
I wish you'd come earlier.
Geitir, take care
of Sigurth's horse, Grani."

6 There was much talking,
there was much speaking,
when those two wise men
had their meeting.

Sigurth said:

"Tell me, if you know,
my uncle,
what do you see
of my fate?"

Gripir said:

7 "You will become
the most famous man
beneath the sun,
most honored of all kings,
you will share your gold
and show your courage,
you will be a handsome man,
and a master of words."

Sigurth said:

8 "Tell me more,
I want to know,
wise king,
if you know it:
What will be
my first journey,
after I have left
your home here?"

Gripir said:

9 "Warrior, first
you will go avenge your father
and get compensation
for the suffering of your kin.
You will kill
the hard, brave sons
of Hunding,
and have a victory."

Sigurth said:

10 "Tell me now, king.
I, your nephew,
want to hear the truth
when we talk together.
Do you see excellent deeds
in my future to boast about,
deeds that will be called the best
beneath the heavens?"

Gripir said:

11 "You alone will kill
the shining serpent,
the greedy worm who lies
on Gnitaheith.
You will kill
both brothers,
Regin and Fafnir.
I do not lie."

Sigurth said:

12 "I'll have plenty of gold
if I go to battle
against worthy foes,
as you clearly foresee.
Let your mind wander
and see yet further;
what sort of fate
is waiting for me?"

Gripir said:

13 "You will find
Gripir's treasure,
you will seize
all that gold.
You will put that gold
on Grani's back,
then ride to the hall
of great King Gjuki."

Sigurth said:

14 "I hope that you
will say even more
than this, my wise,
accomplished uncle:
When I have visited Gjuki,
and left his home,
what sort of fate
will be waiting for me?"

Gripir said:

15 "A beautiful princess,
dressed in armor,
sleeps on a mountain
after the death of Helgi.
You will free
her with your sharp blade.
You will cut her armor
with the sword that killed Fafnir."

Sigurth said:

16 "I'll break her armor,
and the girl will speak
when she wakes
from her sleep.
But then, what
will this wise girl say?
Will she say something
useful to me?"

Gripir said:

17 "She will teach you
useful runes—
everything that people
most desire to know—
she'll teach you to speak
in every language,
and how to heal the suffering—
live well, king!"

Sigurth said:

18 "That meeting will end,
I'll have learned much,
and I'll ride further
along on my way.
Let your mind wander
and see yet further;
what sort of fate
will be waiting for me?"

Gripir said:

19 "You will come
to Heimir's halls.
You'll be a happy guest
of that brave king's.
It's all told, Sigurth,
everything I wanted to say—
please don't ask me
anything further."

Sigurth said:

20 "Now your words
cause me worry,
for I think that you,
wise king, see yet further:
You know there is
some great misfortune
in store for me, and you
don't want to tell it."

Gripir said:

21 "It was easy
to see how your life
would be in
your blooming youth.
But I am not
a real wise man
nor much of a prophet;
I've forgotten what I knew."

Sigurth said:

22 "I know of no one
in the world
who knows better
how to see the future:
Don't conceal it,
even if it's terrible to hear,
even if I'll meet misfortune
on my life's path."

Gripir said:

23 "Your life's path
is not written in mockery;
let that at least
stand out in your memory.
As long as humans
live on this earth,
the name of famous
Sigurth will live among them."

Sigurth said:

24 "I think it's wrong
for me to part from you,
my wise uncle, in this way,
without hearing more.
My fate will go
as it must, no matter what—
but show me how it will go,
my honored uncle, if you will."

Gripir said:

25 "Now Sigurth, my nephew,
I will tell the whole truth,
since you, young hero,
want to force me into it.
First, I'll say something
which you know is no lie:
Your final day is appointed;
death is coming."

Sigurth said:

26 "I don't want
to make you angry,
I only want
to get your good advice.
I have to know for certain
what awaits, even if it's evil;
I want to know what fate
has in store for me."

Gripir said:

27 "There is a beautiful woman
who is living at Heimir's,
and her name will be
remembered as Brynhild.
She is the daughter of Buthli,
but the brave king
Heimir fosters
that hard-hearted girl."

Sigurth said:

28 "So what does it matter
if there is a beautiful woman
growing up
at Heimir's place?
Now I need you
to delve deeper,
for I think that you
have foreseen all my fate."

Gripir said:

29 "That beautiful woman
who is growing up at Heimir's
will deprive you
of all of your happiness.
She will make you sleepless,
she will make you senseless,
you'll pay attention to nothing
unless you're with that girl."

Sigurth said:

30 "Tell me, Gripir,
what can I do
to find some medicine
to heal this illness?
Will this beautiful girl
I intend to marry,
be given to me
in marriage?"

Gripir said:

31 "The two of you
will swear oaths
to one another,
but will keep few of them.
You will be a guest
at Gjuki's one night,
and then you will forget
Brynhild, daughter of Buthli."

Sigurth said:

32 "But Gripir, how will
this happen to me?
Am I made with such
a weak mind?
Will I betray her,
when she
has captured
my whole heart?"

Gripir said:

33 "Others will trick you
into this treachery.
You will be trapped
by Queen Grimhild.
You will ask for the hand
of her bright-haired
daughter; she will
fool you into it."

Sigurth said:

34 "So then I will be
brother-in-law of
great Gunnar,
married to Guthrun.
It seems this would be
a very good marriage,
if I didn't suspect
there's more bad to come."

Gripir said:

35 "Grimhild will
terribly deceive you,
she will ask you
to court Brynhild
for the bride of Gunnar,
that king of the Goths.
And you will promise
to go upon that journey."

Sigurth said:

36 "Clearly I can see
that pain awaits me.
And this is the worst,
that I must court
the famous woman
I love most of all
to be the fair bride
of another man."

Gripir said:

37 "You will
swear many oaths,
you and Gunnar,
together with Hogni.
You and Gunnar will
magically trade
appearances on the journey.
I am not lying."

Sigurth said:

38 "What will that gain me?
Why will we two
change appearances
on this journey?
Some other evil
must follow
all this other evil—
tell me more, Gripir!"

Gripir said:

39 "You will look like Gunnar,
you will act as if you were Gunnar,
but you'll have your own mind
and your own courage;
you will woo Brynhild,
foster-daughter of Heimir,
for Gunnar, and nothing
will prevent it."

Sigurth said:

40 "I think the worst part
is that people will call me
an evildoer
when they hear of this.
I do not wish
to woo the princess,
the best woman I know,
with trickery."

Gripir said:

41 "You will sleep
next to the young woman,
but only as if
she had been your mother.
Because of this,
for a long time
people on this earth
will speak the famed name of Sigurth."

Sigurth said:

42 "Will the famous
King Gunnar
marry this girl,
even after
the wise princess
has slept next to me
for three nights?
Answer me, Gripir!"

Gripir said:

43 "Two bridegrooms,
you and Gunnar,
will toast your weddings
in Gjuki's hall, on the same day.
You'll exchange
appearances again
when you come home,
and have the same souls as before."

Sigurth said:

44 "Will my
brother-in-law and I
stay in good friendship?
Tell me, Gripir!
Will Gunnar
later rejoice for
these weddings,
or will I?"

Gripir said:

45 "You'll remember your oaths,
and you will be silent;
you will live happily
with your wife Guthrun.
But Brynhild will learn
about the deception,
and she will plot
her revenge on you."

Sigurth said:

46 "And what repayment
will Brynhild accept,
from me and the others
who deceived her?
All she'll have from me
are the oaths I swore
and later broke,
and her unhappy fortune."

Gripir said:

47 "She will
tell Gunnar
that you were not
true to him.
She will tell
Gunnar, son of Gjuki,
that he was wrong
to place his trust in you."

Sigurth said:

48 "What is this? Gripir,
tell me honestly,
will her story be true?
Is it true I'll be faithless?
Or will the famous woman
be telling lies
about what she and I did?
Tell me, Gripir!"

Gripir said:

49 "Because of her anger,
the girl will lie about you,
she'll cause you
this heartbreak.
Even though you
were not the cause,
the princess will know
she was won through treachery."

Sigurth said:

50 "Will Gunnar
be fooled by her?
Will Gotthorm be fooled,
and Hogni too?
Will my brothers-in-law
redden their swords
in my flesh?
Tell me, Gripir!"

Gripir said:

51 "The pain
will go to Guthrun's heart
when her brothers
kill you.
She will never be happy,
she will never love again;
it will all be
Grimhild's fault.

52 "But Sigurth,
leader of warriors,
there is one comfort
in your fate:
A better man
will never walk
upon the earth
beneath the sun than you."

Sigurth said:

53 "I part from you in friendship.
My fate will be what it will.
You have done
what I asked you to do,
and I think you would have
happily told me
I would have a better fate,
if that had been my true destiny."

Reginsmal (The Tale of Regin)

Reginsmal (literally "Regin's Words") is the first of a trio of poems concerned with the adventures of the young Sigurth, together with *Fafnismal* and *Sigrdrifumal*. *Reginsmal* begins with a fairly long prose introduction, partially narrated by Regin, about the killing of Regin's brother Otter by the Aesir, and the demands by their father Hreithmar for a large amount of gold in payment for this crime. After telling of how Fafnir, Regin's brother, killed his father Hreithmar for this gold and became a dragon, Regin tells of how he fled to the kingdom of Hjalprek and fostered Sigurth. Sigurth tells Regin he will avenge Hreithmar, but only after he has avenged his own father and uncle on Lyngvi and the other sons of Hunding. In the last stanza of this poem, we read that Sigurth carved the "bloody eagle" (Old Norse *blothugr orn*) on Lyngvi's back. This is a reference to a form of torture in which the victim was laid out flat in a prostrate position and his ribs removed from his back one by one. "Battle-Stirrer" is Odin in disguise.

Reginsmal

Sigurth went to Hjalprek's remuda and chose a horse that later was named Grani. At this time Regin, son of Hreithmar, lived in Hjalprek's kingdom. He was more skillful with his hands than any other man, and a dwarf in height. He was wise, grim, and skilled in magic. Regin fostered and educated Sigurth, and loved him well. He told Sigurth about his parents, and about the events when Odin, Loki, and Honir had come to Andvari's Falls. This was a waterfall where an abundance of fish could be found. A dwarf named Andvari lived there for a long time, in the form of a pikefish, and fed himself there. "Otter was the name of our brother," said Regin, "and he often went to the Falls in the form of an otter. He had caught a salmon and sat on the bank where he was eating it with his eyes closed. Loki threw a stone and killed him. The Aesir felt very lucky about this, and skinned the otter and made a bag out of the skin. That same evening they came as guests to Hreithmar's house and showed him what they had caught. We captured them and threatened their lives if they did not fill that bag with gold, and cover it on the outside with gold as well. Then the Aesir sent Loki to acquire the gold. He came to Ran and borrowed her net,

and went back to Andvari's Falls and threw the net in front of the pikefish, and the fish jumped in. Then Loki said:

1 "WHAT KIND OF FISH IS THIS
swimming in the water,
that doesn't know to avoid a net?
Your head will stay
on your body, if you
can get me some gold."

2 "I am named Andvari,
son of Oin,
I have been in many waterfalls.
A cruel Norn
shaped my fate at the beginning,
cursed me to live in the water."

3 "Tell me this, Andvari," said Loki,
"if you want go free and live
in the halls of men:
What should a man
get in return
if he lies to others?"

4 "They get a lot in return,
all those men who will wade
the traitors' river at Ragnarok.
They will suffer for a long time
if they lie to others,
in return for their untrue words."

Loki saw all the gold that Andvari owned. And after he had taken all of it, Andvari still had one single ring, and Loki took that from him as well. The dwarf then hid inside a stone and said:

5 "This gold
that Gust used to own,
will cause the death
of two brothers,
and cause grief
for eight kings.
No one will enjoy
my treasure."

The Aesir gave Hreithmar the gold. They filled the otter-skin with gold and set the skin on its feet, so that they could cover it with gold from the outside. And when this was done, Hreithmar reached forward and saw one whisker that was still visible, and told the Aesir to cover it. Odin took the ring Andvaranaut and covered the whisker with it.

6 "The gold is delivered," said Loki.
"We've paid a huge price
for my head.
I do not foresee
happiness for your son.
This gold will be the death of you both."

Hreithmar said:

7 "You gave gifts,
but you did not give willingly,
you did not give with a whole heart.
I would have killed you,
both of you,
if I had known it beforehand."

8 Loki said, "It seems to me
that it will only get worse—
men will fight over this gold.
This gold is fated, I think,
to cause hateful news
for kings still unborn."

9 "This gold," said Hreithmar,
"will be mine
as long as I live.
I'm not afraid at all
of your threats.
Go home."

Fafnir and Regin asked Hreithmar for some of the treasure, in payment for the loss of their brother Otter. He denied their requests, but Fafnir killed Hreithmar with a sword while he slept. Hreithmar called out to his daughters:

10 "Lyngheith and Lofnheith,
I am dying! But everyone is destined
for some torment."

Lyngheith answered:

"Few sisters will take vengeance
against a brother,
even for their father."

11 "Have a daughter," said Hreithmar,
"a wolf-fierce girl,
if you cannot have a son
with a king.
You'll need to marry
that girl to a man,
and at last her son
will avenge your sorrow."

Then Hreithmar died, and Fafnir took all the gold. Regin asked for his share in the inheritance from their father, but Fafnir would give him nothing. Regin went to his sister Lyngheith and asked how he should secure his share of the inheritance. She said:

12 "Talk to your brother
pleasantly about the matter,
with a friendly attitude.
You won't get much
from Fafnir if you try
to persuade him with a sword."

Regin told Sigurth these things. One day, when Sigurth came to Regin's house, Regin greeted him happily. Regin said:

13 "Here is the son
of Sigmund,
a clever boy,
he's come to my hall.
He has more courage
than this old man;
I suspect this young wolf
has hope of good hunting.

14 "I will raise him
in my house,
this noble boy,
make a war-brave king out of him.
He'll grow up to be
the greatest king beneath the sun,
the tale of his deeds
will be told everywhere."

Sigurth was always with Regin, and Regin told Sigurth about how Fafnir lay on Gnitaheith in the form of a dragon. He had a helmet of terror that instilled fear in all living things.

Regin made a sword called Gram for Sigurth. This sword was so sharp that he put its blade in the river Rhine and let a tuft of wool flow downstream onto the blade, and the wool split as if it were water. With this sword, Sigurth cut Regin's anvil in half. After this, Regin encouraged Sigurth to kill Fafnir. Sigurth said:

15 "The sons of Hunding,
who killed my father and
my father-in-law Eylimi,
would laugh out loud
if I seemed to care
more for golden rings
than for vengeance
for my father Sigmund."

King Hjalprek outfitted Sigurth with ships and men for his mission of avenging his father. They were caught in a bad storm and delayed at a certain headland. A man stood on the rock and said:

16 "Who is it there
riding those ships
on the high waves,
on the roaring sea?
Those ships are sure
sweating with the trouble;
I doubt that they
will stand up to the wind."

Regin answered:

17 "Here I am, with Sigurth,
on these ships,
this breeze will blow us

to our deaths.
A high wave
crashes on deck,
the ships will wreck.
Who is asking?"

18 "They called me
Battle-Stirrer,
when young Volsung
set a table for the ravens.
You can call me
'Man on the Rock,'
or 'Burden' or 'Spellcaster.'
I want a ride."

They went to land and the man came onto the ship, and the weather immediately improved.

19 Sigurth said, "Tell me,
Battle-Stirrer, since you know
the omens of gods and humans,
what is the best
kind of omen
when men are about to fight?"

Battle-Stirrer said:

20 "There are many good omens
before one goes into battle,
if you know how to recognize them.
A man with a faithful following
of black-winged ravens
will fight a winning battle.

21 "There is a second good omen:
If you are outside,
out on the road,
and you see two men
standing in the yard,
ready to make battle.

22 "There is a third omen:
If you hear a wolf howl

under the limbs of an ash,
you and not your enemy
will have good luck,
if you see him first.

23 "No one
should leave for battle
facing the
setting sun.
Bold men
have victories
if they can see,
or line up in formation.

24 "You are in grave danger
if you stumble
on your way to battle.
It means that evil spirits
stand on either side of you,
and want to see you get hurt.

25 "Every man should
keep himself well-kempt and clean,
and eat up in the morning.
You never know
where you'll be in the evening,
so it's bad to leave home hungry."

Sigurth had a great battle against Lyngvi, son of Hunding, and his brothers. Lyngvi and his three brothers were killed. After the battle Regin said:

26 "Now the bloody eagle
is carved with a bitter blade
on the back
of the killer of Sigmund.
No better man
than Sigurth has ever
soaked the earth with blood,
and set a table for the ravens."

Sigurth went home to Hjalprek. Then Regin encouraged Sigurth to kill Fafnir.

Fafnismal (The Tale of Fafnir)

Fafnismal (literally "Fafnir's Words") continues the trilogy of poems concerning the adventures of Sigurth as a young adult. Here, Sigurth stabs the dragon Fafnir and has a long conversation with the dying dragon, including stanzas in which Fafnir gives apparently irrelevant advice (st. 11) as well as information about the Norns and gods (st. 13, 15). Once the dragon has died, Regin encourages Sigurth to cook his heart, but Sigurth burns his finger on the meat and then places the burnt finger in his mouth, gaining the power to understand birds when he does so. With his new ability, he is warned by some wagtails (an Old World type of long-tailed bird) that Regin will betray him. Sigurth slays Regin and then listens to the birds describe the ladies he could potentially woo—including both of the women he will later court, Guthrun and Brynhild/Sigerdrifa. The birds are called *igthur* in the Old Norse text, and my identification of them as wagtails (uniquely among English-language translators) is based on the use of a related word for wagtails in some Norwegian dialects.

Fafnismal

Sigurth and Regin went up on Gnitaheith, and there they found the path that Fafnir followed when he slithered down to the water. Sigurth dug a deep pit in the path, and hid himself inside. When Fafnir slithered off his heap of gold and onto the path, he blew poison from his mouth, spraying it over Sigurth's head. And when Fafnir slithered over Sigurth's pit, Sigurth thrust his sword through the dragon up to the heart. Fafnir trembled and thrashed his head and tail. Sigurth leapt out of the pit, and the two saw one another. Fafnir said:

1 "YOUNG MAN, YOUNG MAN!
Who is your father?
What family are you from?
Who are you who reddened
your glistening sword in Fafnir?
The sword is in my heart."

Sigurth did not reveal his name, because they believed in old times that the words of a dying man were powerful, if he cursed his enemy by name. Sigurth said:

2 "I am called 'clever beast,'
and I have always been
a motherless son.
I don't have a father
like the sons of men do.
I am always alone."

Fafnir said:

3 "If you had no father
like the sons of men do,
in what strange way were you born?"

Sigurth said:

4 "I think my family
is unknown to you,
my identity as well.
I am named Sigurth,
my father was Sigmund—
it was I who killed you with weapons."

Fafnir said:

5 "Who made you do it?
Why did you let someone
convince you to take my life?
You fierce-eyed young man,
I don't doubt you had a warlike father;
it shows clearly in your eyes."

Sigurth said:

6 "My courage made me do it,
my hands assisted me,
and my sharp sword, too.
Not many men are brave
in adulthood,
if they were cowards as boys."

Fafnir said:

7 "I know, if you had grown up
in your own family's embrace,
you might have killed me for courage's sake.
But you are a prisoner,
one taken in war—
they say captives always tremble."

Sigurth said:

8 "Why do you mock me, Fafnir,
for being far away
from my father's kin?
I am no prisoner,
though I was taken in war—
you noticed that I live free."

Fafnir said:

9 "You think that everything
I say to you is mockery,
but I tell you the truth:
my clanging gold,
this wealth that glows like embers,
will bring about your death."

Sigurth said:

10 "Every man will
have control of his wealth
till his fated death-day,
but there is a time
when each one of us
leaves here for Hel."

Fafnir said:

11 "You'll meet your death
if you sail too close to land,
and what a foolish death it will be.
You'll drown in the water,
if you row in the wind—
everything is dangerous for a doomed man."

Sigurth said:

12 "Tell me, Fafnir,
they say you are wise,
and very knowledgeable—
who are the Norns
who govern childbirth
and choose who mothers what child?"

Fafnir said:

13 "There are various
different kinds of Norns:
they are not all of one family.
Some are god-born,
some are elves,
others come from the dwarves."

Sigurth said:

14 "Tell me, Fafnir,
they say you are wise,
and very knowledgeable—
what is the name of the island
where the gods and giants
will fight their final battle?"

Fafnir said:

15 "It is called Oskopnir;
and there all the gods
will wage war.
Bifrost will break
when they cross that bridge;
their horses will swim it.

16 "I wore a terror-helmet
against all men
so long as I sat on my treasure.
I thought I alone
was braver than everyone:
not many came to meet me."

Sigurth said:

17 "That terror-helmet
will not save anyone
when angry men come together to fight.
When a real battle starts,
you'll always find
that there is no bravest man."

Fafnir said:

18 "I blew poison from my jaws
as long as I lay
upon my father's great treasure."

Sigurth said:

19 "You brave snake,
you blew your poison,
and you had a bold heart.
But men hate you,
and their hate grows all the more
because you have that helmet."

Fafnir said:

20 "I advise you, Sigurth:
Take my advice,
and ride home from here.
My clanging gold,
this ember-glowing wealth,
will bring about your death."

Sigurth said:

21 "I hear your advice,
but I will ride to the gold
where it lies on the ground—
and you, Fafnir,
stay here and die,
and Hel can have you."

Fafnir said:

22 "Regin betrayed me,
he will betray you as well.
He will bring death to us both.
I think that I am nearly
on the point of dying:
you had the greater strength, for now."

Regin had been away while Sigurth fought Fafnir, but he came back as Sigurth wiped the blood from his blade. Regin said:

23 "Hail, Sigurth!
Now you've won a victory
and killed Fafnir.
Of all men
who live on the earth,
I think you're the least cowardly."

Sigurth said:

24 "It's impossible to say,
when we compare
all sons of men,
which one is least cowardly—
there's many a bold man
who's never bloodied a sword
in another man's chest."

Regin said:

25 "You are happy now, Sigurth,
wiping the blood
off your sword in the grass,
rejoice in your victory!
But you have killed my brother,
though I had a part in that also."

Sigurth said:

26 "It was your advice
that I should ride here
to these frosty mountains:
the shining serpent
would still have life, and the treasure,
if you had not challenged my courage."

Then Regin went to Fafnir's body and cut the heart out with his sword Rithil. Regin drank the blood from the wound. Regin said:

27 "Sit now, Sigurth,
roast Fafnir's heart on the fire.
I will be sleeping.
I want to make
a meal of his heart
after that drink of dragon's blood."

Sigurth said:

28 "You hid far away
while I killed Fafnir
with my sharp sword.
I tested my strength
against the dragon,
while you crept in the bushes."

Regin said:

29 "You would have left
that ancient monster
creeping in the bushes himself,
if you did not have the sword
that I made for you,
that good sharp sword of yours."

Sigurth said:

30 "When men are in battle,
a courageous heart
means more than a sharp sword.
I've seen a brave man
win a victory,
though he fought with a dull blade.

31 "Better to be bold
than a coward,
when sharp swords come together.
Better to be cheerful
than gloomy,
however events may turn."

Sigurth took Fafnir's heart and roasted it on a spit. And when he thought it would be fully cooked, and the blood all boiled out of the heart, he tested whether the heart was ready to eat by touching it with his finger. His finger was burned, and he put it in his mouth. But when the blood from Fafnir's heart touched his tongue, he could understand the language of birds. He heard some wagtails talking in the branches above him. One of the wagtails said:

32 "There sits Sigurth,
splattered with blood,
cooking Fafnir's heart
on the open flame.
I would say this prince
was a wise man,
if he were the one who ate
the dragon's heart."

A second one said:

33 "Over there is Regin,
conspiring against Sigurth,
he'll betray this boy
who trusts him.
In his bloody rage,
he ponders evil—
that wrongdoer
will avenge his brother."

A third wagtail said:

34 "He should let that crafty Regin
go straight to Hel,
shorter by about a head.
Then all the gold
would be Sigurth's alone,
that whole treasure of Fafnir."

A fourth bird said:

35 "I would think Sigurth was wise
if he knew how to heed
your good advice,
my sisters,

if he took our advice
and set a table for the ravens.
I always suspect a wolf
when I see a wolf's ears sticking up."

A fifth said:

36 "He is not as wise
as I would have thought,
Sigurth, this lord
of many battles—
not if he lets one brother
live free and at ease
when he has killed
the other!"

A sixth said:

37 "It would be unwise
if he spared that enemy.
There Regin lies,
the brother
who advised him on this course—
can Sigurth not see the danger?"

A seventh said:

38 "Let Regin be a head shorter,
that frost-cold monster
should be deprived of his inheritance,
and then Sigurth would be
the sole owner
of the gold that was Fafnir's."

Sigurth said:

39 "It would be a poor fate,
if Regin
caused my death.
I think
both brothers should go
to Hel together today."

Sigurth cut off Regin's head, and then he ate Fafnir's heart and drank the blood of both Regin and Fafnir. Then Sigurth heard the wagtails saying:

40 "Pack up
all these treasures, Sigurth;
it would not be kingly
to worry for long.
I know a woman
more beautiful
than any other—
if you could get her.

41 "The roads to Gjuki's halls
are green,
they show the way
for warriors.
Sigurth,
that rich king
has raised a daughter—
and you could buy her.

42 "And there's a hall
high on Hindarfjall,
encircled all around
by flame:
wise men
have made that wall
from living
ardent fire.

43 "I know that a Valkyrie
sleeps on that mountain,
where fire plays
around her.
Odin stung her with a thorn:
she killed a different man
than Odin wished,
that unfaithful Valkyrie.

44 "Sigurth, you could see
that girl beneath her helmet,
when you ride away
from this battlefield.
They say no one
can break Sigerdrifa's sleep,
no one can change
what fate has determined."

Sigurth followed Fafnir's tracks to his lair, and found the iron doors and gates open. All the pillars were also made of iron, and they were dug deep into the earth. Sigurth found a great quantity of gold there, and he filled two chests with it. He took the terror-helmet and a golden suit of armor, and the sword Hrotti and many other precious treasures, and he loaded them onto his horse Grani. But even with that burden, the horse would not start till Sigurth had mounted up on his back.

Sigrdrifumal (The Meeting with Brynhild)

Having been told of her by the birds at the end of *Fafnismal*, Sigurth now goes to the mountain Hindarfjall where the Valkyrie Sigerdrifa sleeps. As with many other poems concerned with the Volsungs, there is a prose introduction and occasional prose notes in the manuscript, which are translated here along with the poetic stanzas. Sigerdrifa (literally "victory-driver") may or may not be the same person as the Valkyrie Brynhild, who appears in the later poems about Sigurth. Much of the poem consists of Sigerdrifa's advice to Sigurth, which is reminiscent of *Havamal*, both in the tone of her general advice, and in her insistence about the power of the runes.

Sigrdrifumal

Sigurth rode up on the mountain Hindarfjall, south toward Frankish lands. He saw a great light on the mountain, as though a fire burned there, and it glowed against the sky. When he came to it, he saw a fortress, and there were flags flying on top of it. Sigurth went into the fortress and saw a person sleeping there on the floor, fully armed. He took the helmet off first, and then he realized this person was a woman. Her chainmail was as tight as if it had grown to her skin. He took his sword Gram and cut the chainmail off, first cutting down the middle, and then down both sleeves. Then he took the chainmail off of her, and she woke up and saw Sigurth and said:

1 "WHAT BROKE THE CHAINMAIL?
Why am I awake?
Who has freed me
from my imprisoning armor?"

He answered:

"Sigmund's son
is the one who cut it.
Sigurth's sword is fresh
from feeding the ravens."

2 She said: "I have slept so long,
I have been asleep so long,
human sorrows last so long.
Odin cursed me
never to break the sleeping-spell
by my own power."

Sigurth sat down and asked her name. She took a horn full of mead and offered him the ritual drink.

3 She said: "Hail the day!
Hail the sons of day!
Hail to night and her sister!
Look on the two of us here
with friendly eyes,
and give us victory.

4 "Hail the gods!
Hail the goddesses!
Hail the hospitable earth!
Give the two of us
eloquent speech, and wisdom—
and healing hands, while we live."

She was named Sigerdrifa and she was a Valkyrie. She said that two kings had fought. One was named Hjalm-Gunnar; he was old and a great warrior, and Odin had promised him victory. The other was named Agnar, brother of Hautha, who received help from no one. Sigerdrifa killed Hjalm-Gunnar in this battle. But Odin stung her with a sleep-thorn in revenge for this, and said she would never again choose victories in battle and that she would have to marry. "But I told him that I had sworn an oath to marry no man except one who knew no fear," she said.

Sigurth asked her to teach him wisdom, if she knew news from all the realms. Sigerdrifa said:

5 "I bring you beer,
warrior,
blended with strength
and fame.
It's full of spells
and magic,
good enchantments
and happy words.

6 "You should carve victory-runes
if you want to have victory.
Carve some on the hilt of your sword,
carve some on the middle of the blade also,
some elsewhere on the sword,
and name Tyr twice.

7 "You should learn beer-runes
if you don't want another man's wife
to abuse your trust if you have a tryst.
Carve them on the drinking-horn
and on the back of your hand,
and carve the rune for 'N' on your fingernail.

8 "You should bless the drinking-horn;
then watch out for trouble
and throw garlic in the drink.
If you do this, I know
you'll never drink mead
that's blended with a curse.

9 "You should learn life-saving runes
if you want to save a woman's life
when she is in the throes of childbirth.
Carve them on your palm,
and clasp them around your limbs,
and pray to your family spirits for help.

10 "You should make wave-runes
if you want to save ships
out on the wild water.
You should carve them on the ship's bow
and on the steering-rudder,
and burn them into the oars.
Then there won't be any steep wave,
there won't be any blue waves,
that you won't escape from safely.

11 "You should learn limb-runes
if you want to be a healer
and learn how to heal wounds.

Carve them on bark,
carve them on the needles of a pine
that bends eastward.

12 "You should learn speech-runes
to prevent those who hate you
from taking vengeance on you.
Wind them around,
weave them around,
set them all around,
at the court
where people go
for judgments.

13 "You should learn mind-runes
if you want to be wiser
than any other man.
Odin read them,
Odin carved them,
Odin thought them up,
from the liquid
that leaked
from the skull of Heithdraupnir,
from the horn of Hoddrofnir.

14 "Odin stood on a mountain,
Brimir's sword in his hand
and a helmet on his head,
when wise Mimir's head
spoke the first word,
and spoke truthfully.

15 "Runes were carved on the shield
that stood before the shining sun,
on the ears and hooves
of the horses that draw the sun,
on the wheel
of the chariot of Thor,
on the reins of Sleipnir,
on the reins of his sled.

16 “They were carved on a bear’s paw
and a poet’s tongue,
on a wolf’s claws
and an eagle’s beak,
on bloody wings
and a bridge’s beams,
on a helper’s palm
and a healer’s footprint.

17 “They were carved on glass
and gold, on treasures,
in wine and in beer
and a witch’s chair,
on Odin’s spearpoint
and a troll-woman’s breast,
on a Norn’s fingernail
and the beak of an owl.

18 “All of them that were carved
were then shaved off,
and they were stirred into the holy mead
and sent far away.
Some are with the Aesir,
some are with the elves,
some are with the Vanir,
and mortal men have some.

19 “The beechtree-runes
and life-saving runes
and all the beer-runes
and the famous strength-runes
will be of good use
for everyone who knows them
completely and correctly.
Use them, if you know them,
till the gods die.

20 “Now you must choose
from the options you are offered,
mighty warrior.
Choose to speak,

or choose to remain silent:
Your fate is already decided."

21 Sigurth responded, "I will never flee,
even if you know I am doomed to die.
I was not born a coward.
I want to have
all of your loving advice,
as long as I live."

22 Sigerdrifa said, "I advise you first,
that you behave faultlessly
with regard to your kin.
Don't avenge yourself on them,
even if they give you cause—
or your bad name will lead to your death.

23 "I'll give you more advice:
Never swear an oath,
unless your words are true.
The grim rope of a hangman
waits for the oath-breaker,
the fate of a liar is agony.

24 "I'll give you a third bit of advice.
You should not speak with fools
at public events.
An unwise man will often say
worse things
than he realizes.

25 "You'll lose everything
if you stay silent when you're mocked.
You will seem like a coward,
or the slander will seem true.
A reputation is dangerous,
unless you earn yourself a good one.
So wait for another day
to kill a fool who mocks you,
and then repay him for his lie.

26 “I’ll give you advice a fourth time.
If an evil sorceress
offers you lodging on your journey,
it is better to keep going
than to stay with her—
even if darkness sets on you outside.

27 “Warriors need
prudent eyes,
if they wish to wage battles.
Often witches wise in magic
will sit near a road, dulling
men’s sword-blades—and their minds.

28 “I’ll give you a fifth shred of advice.
If you see a pretty woman
sitting on a bench,
don’t let that woman
into your dreams—
don’t try to seduce a woman.

29 “I’ll advise you a sixth thing:
If, in the course of drinking,
men become drunk,
do not fight your enemy
while you are drunk.
Wine steals the wits of many.

30 “Often a night
of song and beer
has caused men unhappiness;
it’s sometimes caused their death,
it’s sometimes gotten them cursed.
Drunkenness has caused untold sorrows.

31 “I’ll give you a seventh bit of advice.
If you dispute a case
with courageous men,
it is better to fight them right away
than wait for them to burn you
inside your own home.

32 “I’ll give you advice an eighth time.
You should avoid evil,
and stay a long way away from lying.
Do not seduce a girl,
nor any man’s wife—
do not encourage women’s looseness.

33 “I’ll give you advice a ninth time.
Respect a dead body,
whether you find it on the ground,
whether the death was from sickness,
or drowning at sea,
or men’s violence.

34 “Clean the bodies
of the dead,
wash their hands and head,
and comb and dry them
before you put them in a coffin,
then wish them a good rest.

35 “I’ll give you a tenth bit of advice.
You should never believe
the oaths of your enemy’s son.
If you have killed his brother,
or slain his father,
then there’s a wolf in that young man,
even if he accepts your money.

36 “Disputes and fights
are never forgotten,
and no one forgets sorrow.
Every man needs
his wits and his weapons
if he wants to have his way.

37 “I’ll give you an eleventh bit of advice:
Avoid evil,
whatever path you take.
I don’t think you’ll live long,
prince of warriors—
great battles are before you.”

Brot af Sigurtharkvithu
(Fragment of a Poem about Sigurth)

As its name implies, *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* ("Fragment of a Poem about Sigurth") is incomplete, the result of many of its first pages being torn out of the manuscript. To judge from *Volsunga saga*, which was written when the lost parts of the poem were available, we are missing a story that goes something like the following: Sigurth did not marry the Valkyrie Sigerdrifa, but instead married Guthrun and pledged brotherhood with her brothers, Gunnar, Hogni, and Gotthorm (this agrees with the poem, st. 17). Afterwards he courted the Valkyrie Brynhild on behalf of his brother-in-law Gunnar (and disguised as him) and even slept in her bed, but he laid a sword between them in bed so as not to betray his brother-in-law's trust (agreeing with the poem, st. 19). Long after marrying Gunnar, Brynhild became enraged when she learned of the deception, and called for Gunnar and his brothers to kill Sigurth. The youngest brother, Gotthorm, was given a magical potion to drive him into a frenzy in order to commit the deed (suggested in the poem, st. 4). Brynhild seems to have incited Gunnar to kill Sigurth on the pretext that Sigurth would have become more prominent than Gunnar and his brothers, and threatened their possession of their own ancestral kingdom of the Goths (see the poem, st. 7–8).

Judging from the amount of narrative that is missing from the poem, from the physical size of the gap in the manuscript, and from the fact that *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma* is actually quite long in spite of its name (which translates literally as "The Short Poem of Sigurth," implying the existence of a longer one), we must infer that this fragment was part of a very long poem. The part that survives is only the very end, telling of the events just before and just after the murder of Sigurth. The killing itself is not directly told; the poem skips from the tense moments before the murder (st. 1–4), to the conversations of Guthrun with her brothers and Brynhild after the murder (st. 5–11), to the surprisingly intimate portraits of guilt-laden grief and rage felt by Gunnar and Brynhild the following night and morning (st. 12–19). At the end of the poem, a prose note acknowledges the existence of different traditions concerning the killing of Sigurth.

Brot af Sigurtharkvithu

Hogni said:

1 "... WHAT INJURY HAS SIGURTH DONE
to you
that you would wish to kill
that trusty king?"

2 Gunnar said, "Sigurth
has sworn oaths to me,
he's sworn oaths to me,
and all of them were lies.
He deceived me
when he should have kept
all his oaths
like an honorable man."

3 Hogni said, "It's Brynhild
who's egged you on.
She's made you think about
causing such cruel sorrow.
She won't stand for Guthrun
to have such a man as Sigurth—
and she grows impatient
of life with you."

4 They cooked wolf-meat,
they chopped up snake-meat,
they gave wolf-meat
to Gotthorm.
And thus they made the
young man thirst for violence,
made him dare to lay hands
on the wise Sigurth.

5 Guthrun, Gjuki's daughter,
stood outside,
and seeing her brothers return,
she asked them:
"Where is Sigurth?
Where is my king,

who rode out
before you, brothers?"

6 Only Hogni
dared give her an answer:
"We cut Sigurth
apart with swords.
Now his gray horse
stays near the man's body."

7 Brynhild, Buthli's daughter,
said this to them:
"You brothers shall take joy
in your weapons and lands.
Sigurth would have taken
it all for himself,
if you'd allowed him to live
even a little longer.

8 "It would have been unwise
if you allowed Sigurth
to take your father Gjuki's lands
and rule the Goths,
when Gjuki has
five sons,
five princes,
all of them fierce fighters."

9 Then Brynhild laughed—
all the walls echoed—
it was the only time she laughed
with a whole heart:
"You brothers will enjoy
your lives and lands a long time,
now that you have slain
that bold lord of warriors."

10 Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,
said this to her:
"You speak so many
wretched words, Brynhild.

Woe awaits Gunnar,
the killer of Sigurth—
my husband's brave heart
will be avenged.

11 "Sigurth was killed
south of the Rhine;
but a raven screamed
in the trees up above:
'Attila will bloody
his weapons in you;
your broken oaths
will destroy you.'"

12 The evening wore on,
and there was much drinking.
Everything was discussed
that had happened that day,
then everyone retreated to bed
and fell asleep.

13 Gunnar alone was awake
longer than the others.
His feet stirred restlessly,
his mind stirred restlessly;
the warrior
was remembering
what the birds said
in the woods—
what the raven had said,
and an eagle, when they rode home.

14 Brynhild, the Valkyrie,
Buthli's daughter,
woke up a little
before the sun, and said:
"Am I angered or soothed?
I don't know, but I'm troubled.
I must speak it aloud,
or let it be."

15 Everyone was silent
when Brynhild spoke up;
few could understand
her intentions
when Brynhild wept,
and began to speak
about the killing
she had asked them to commit:

16 "Gunnar, I had
a nightmare last night:
everyone in this hall died,
and I slept in a cold bed.
But you, fierce warrior,
kept walking sadly on,
tied up in chains,
you entered an enemy's camp.
I foresee
that all you Niflungs
will lose your power—
you cursed oathbreakers.

17 "Did you forget, Gunnar,
when you and Sigurth both
blended your blood
in a pledge of brotherhood?
Now you have repaid
all his good with your evil—
Sigurth, who let you
be the foremost.

18 "I tested him
when that bold man
rode to woo me
in the circle of flame—
I remember
how faithfully
that noble young man
kept *his* promises.

19 "That wealthy king
laid a sword between us,
a killer's tool
decorated with gold.
That sword's blade
was hardened in flame
and tempered
in drops of poison."

Concerning the Death of Sigurth: This poem tells of the death of Sigurth, and in this version it is told that he was murdered outdoors, but some people say that he was killed in his own bed. But the Germans say that they killed Sigurth out in the forest, and in *Guthrunarkvitha II* it says that Sigurth and the sons of Gjuki had ridden to a council when Sigurth was killed. But everyone agrees that Gjuki's sons betrayed his trust, and that Sigurth was killed while unsuspecting and unarmed.

Guthrunarkvitha I (The First Poem of Guthrun)

Guthrunarkvitha I ("The First Poem of Guthrun") provides a compelling picture of mourning, as Guthrun, confronted with the death of her husband Sigurth, is too shocked to weep. Many men and women attempt to comfort her by telling her of their own sorrows, but eventually she is only able to weep when she embraces her dead husband's body.

Guthrunarkvitha I

Guthrun sat by her dead husband Sigurth. She did not cry, as other women do, but she was nearly bursting with sorrow. Both men and women came to her to comfort her, but it was not easy to do. People say that Guthrun ate some of the dragon Fafnir's heart, and from doing so, she learned how to understand the language of birds. What follows is also composed about Guthrun:

1 GUTHRUN WAS READY
for death, long ago,
when she sat in sorrow
next to Sigurth's corpse.
She did not weep,
she did not wring her hands,
she did not scream
like other women do.

2 Wise noblemen
came to her.
They tried to offer
some comfort to her.
But Guthrun could not
find the comfort of weeping,
and her chest was nearly
bursting with sorrow.

3 The wives of these nobles,
born to high families,
sat next to Guthrun,

decorated in gold.
Each one of them
told of her life's sorrows,
each one told of
the worst she had endured.

4 Then Gjaflaug,
Guthrun's aunt, spoke:
"I live with less joy
than anyone else on earth.
I have endured
the deaths of five husbands,
two daughters,
three sisters,
and eight brothers,
and only I survive."

5 But Guthrun could not
find the comfort of weeping.
She was too miserable
over the death of her son,
too miserable
at the sight of her dead husband.

6 Then Herborg,
queen of Hunland, spoke:
"I have a worse pain
to tell about.
All seven of my sons,
together with my husband,
fell in battle
south of here.

7 "My father and mother,
and four of my brothers,
they all died
in a windstorm at sea,
the hard waves
came over the ship's side.

8 “I had to dress their bodies,
I had to dig their graves,
I had to handle
their funerals myself.
I endured all of this
within less than half a year,
and not a single person
said a word to comfort me.

9 “And within six months,
I was taken prisoner,
made a captive,
led into slavery.
I was forced to dress
and tie the shoes
of my lord’s wife
every morning.

10 “She hated me
from jealousy,
she beat me
savagely.
I have never known
a better lord,
I have never known
a worse lady.”

11 But Guthrun could not
find the comfort of weeping.
She was too miserable
over the death of her son,
too miserable
at the sight of her dead husband.

12 Gullrond, Guthrun’s sister,
said to Gjaflaug:
“Foster-mother,
although you’re wise,
you don’t know how
to comfort a young widow.”

She advised them not
to cover the dead man's body.

13 She lifted the bedcloths
from Sigurth's body
and laid his head
on Guthrun's knees:
"Look at your beloved!
Put your mouth to his,
embrace your husband
as you did when he lived."

14 Guthrun cast
a single glance on him,
she saw her husband's hair
dripping with blood,
she saw the fire
in his eyes dimmed,
she saw her beloved's chest
split by a sword-wound.

15 Guthrun sank back
upon her pillow,
her hair shaking loose,
her cheeks turning red,
and a long rain of tears
fell on her knees.

16 Then Guthrun,
daughter of Gjuki, wept.
She wept, the tears
poured from her eyes,
and the flock of geese
which she kept outside
screamed loudly
in response.

17 Then Gullrond,
daughter of Gjuki, spoke:
"I think the love
between the two of you

was the greatest
of all couples' on the earth.
You had no joy,
whether at home
or outside,
unless he was by your side."

18 Guthrun said, "My Sigurth
was, next to my brothers,
like a garlic stalk
towering above the grass.
He was like a bright jewel
set in a crown,
a precious stone
to mark a king's forehead.

19 "Even kings agreed
that I, as Sigurd's wife, was better,
higher than all the Valkyries
who serve Odin.
But I've become
as little as
a leaf in the forest,
now that Sigurth has fallen.

20 "I looked in the hall,
I looked in our bed
for my beloved,
but it was the sons of Gjuki,
my brothers,
who caused my pain,
it is they who caused
their sister to weep so bitterly.

21 "You, my brothers,
you will be just as bad at ruling
your lands as you were
at keeping your oaths.
And you, Gunnar,
you'll never enjoy the treasure.
Those rings

will be your death,
because you swore
false oaths to Sigurth.

22 "There was once
so much joy in our garden,
when my beloved Sigurth
saddled Grani,
and the two of you
went to woo Brynhild,
that wretched creature
with her evil luck."

23 Then Brynhild,
Buthli's daughter, spoke:
"Let me also lose
my husband
and my children!
I am the one who
made you weep,
made you talk like this."

24 Then Gullrond,
daughter of Gjuki, spoke:
"Silence, you curse on this people!
No more of these words.
You have always caused
misery for our noble family.
Everyone wishes you
a bad end;
you have been the sorrow
of seven kings,
and the betrayer
of all women."

25 Then Brynhild,
daughter of Buthli, spoke:
"Attila, alone,
causes all this distress,
he is my brother,
born to my father Buthli.

26 "It began when we two,
brother and sister,
looked upon Sigurth,
loaded with Fafnir's gold.
I have paid
for that vision now,
that vision of wealth
which thrills me still."

27 Brynhild,
daughter of Buthli,
leaned on the wall,
she summoned her strength,
but fire burned in her eyes
and she snorted venomously
when she saw the wounds
of Sigurth.

Guthrun then departed for the forests in the wilderness, and walked all the way to Denmark, where she stayed with Thora, daughter of Hakon, for three and a half years. Brynhild did not wish to survive Sigurth, and she ordered eight of her slaves and five of her slavewomen killed. Then she stabbed herself with Sigurth's sword, as is told in *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*.

Sigurtharkvitha en skamma (A Short Poem of Sigurth)

Sigurtharkvitha en skamma ("A Short Poem of Sigurth") is one of the longest poems preserved in the *Codex Regius*, and it is probably among the younger poems in the Poetic Edda. Its length is in spite of its title, which implies that the surviving *Brot af Sigurtharkvithu* must be the remains of a narrative poem that was very long. This poem gives us an abbreviated version of the tale of Sigurth's marriage to Guthrun, of his life with her and her brothers (Gunnar, Hogni, and Gotthorm), and of Sigurth's death at the hands of Gotthorm. In the version of the tale told in this poem, Brynhild's motivation for wanting Sigurth dead appears to be simple jealousy, although she hints that Sigurth disguised himself as Gunnar when wooing her (st. 36), and that this must be avenged. Indeed, the largest constituent part of the poem (st. 50–70) comprises Brynhild's regrets at not being married to Sigurth, her warnings to Gunnar and Guthrun about their own dark future, and her commandments for the lavish funeral that she orders for Sigurth and for herself.

Sigurtharkvitha en skamma

1 IT WAS LONG AGO
when Sigurth visited Gjuki—
that young Volsung
had killed a dragon.
He and Gjuki's sons,
Gunnar and Hogni,
became blood brothers—
those bold men swore oaths.

2 They offered him a wife
and abundant treasure.
It was Guthrun they offered,
their sister—
for many days
young Sigurth
drank and talked
with the sons of Gjuki.

3 Then they departed
to woo Brynhild,
and Sigurth came along
with them on that journey;
it was young Sigurth
who showed them the way.
That bride should have been his,
but that was not his fate.

4 Sigurth, that famous Hun,
laid a naked sword,
his sharp weapon,
between them in the bed.
He never did
kiss that woman,
he never did
hold her in his arms.
Sigurth remembered
she was promised to Gunnar.

5 That lady had never
known sorrow,
her life had contained
not a hint of sadness.
That innocent girl
suspected no wrongdoing,
but the cruel Norns
intended otherwise for her.

6 She sat alone
in the evening of that day,
and she spoke
openly, plainly:
"I will have Sigurth—
I will hold that young lord
in my arms,
or I will starve.

7 "Well, so I've spoken,
but now I regret those words.
He is married to Guthrun,

I am married to Gunnar;
the cruel Norns will make us
suffer forever."

8 Later, Brynhild
would often take walks,
lonely, sorrowing,
over ice and snow,
every evening,
thinking of Guthrun
in bed with Sigurth, thinking
of Sigurth beneath the sheets,
the Hunnish prince
making love to another wife.

9 "I am deprived
of that man, and of all joy.
I must seek my comfort
in cruel thoughts."

10 She took her hatred
and encouraged murder:
"Gunnar! You will lose
your lands, and even me,
to Sigurth. And how could I
ever love that man?

11 "I will go home
to where I dwelled before,
I will go back to be
among my own family,
and go again into long sleep,
unless you kill Sigurth
and prove yourself better
than all other kings.

12 "And let the wolf-pup
follow the wolf to Hel!
You shouldn't be so foolish
as to nourish his son.
You won't have to worry

so much about vengeance,
if you kill the son
together with the father."

13 Gunnar was sad
and downtrodden:
he was anxious,
he sat all day,
he knew that he didn't
at all want to do
the thing he knew
he most *had* to do,
the thing that would
profit him the most.
But he thought the death
of Sigurth would be bad;
he knew that Sigurth
would be a great loss.

14 He thought long,
he thought anxiously,
he thought of the shame,
the unprecedented shame
that would be his—
the shame of a man left by his wife.
So he went for advice
to his brother Hogni,
and brought him into his confidence—
there was a faithful friend.

15 Gunnar said, "I think
Brynhild, daughter of Buthli,
is better than all other women,
she is the pride of all women.
And I would rather
lose my own life
than lose such a treasure
as this wife is to me.

16 "Do you want to betray
a man, to increase our wealth?

It would be good
to control Sigurth's treasure.
If we had so much gold,
would our lives
not be happier,
more leisurely?"

17 Bold Hogni
answered his brother:
"What a shameful deed
you consider!
To break our oaths,
our sworn oaths,
the words we pledged,
with violence!

18 "I know of no happier
people in all the world,
as long as we brothers
and our father rule the Goths,
and that excellent Hun,
Sigurth, lives with us.
Nor do I know of any
mightier men on earth.
Let us and him
raise our sons together,
let us increase
our good families.

19 "And yet I know
what lies behind all this:
the ugly jealousy
of Brynhild!"

20 Gunnar said, "Let us
prepare Gotthorm,
our young brother,
to do the killing.
He was too young to swear
a pledge to Sigurth—

he has no oath to break,
no faithful promises to keep."

21 Young Gotthorm
was easily convinced.
His sword pierced Sigurth's
hard, heroic heart.

22 The dying Sigurth
rose from his bed;
he threw his sword
at the young man.
His fierce iron blade,
his good sword Gram,
flew shining from his hand,
and cut down Gotthorm.

23 The boy
was split in two:
his head and hands
fell one way,
his feet and hips
fell another.

24 Guthrun was asleep,
lying blithely in bed
at Sigurth's side,
sorrowless and safe.
But she awoke
to the cold death of her hopes,
she awoke in a pool
of her husband's blood.

25 She wrung her hands
in uncontrollable sorrow;
but Sigurth rose pridefully,
and he spoke to his wife:
"Don't weep so sorely,
Guthrun, dear wife!
You're a young woman—
and your brothers still live.

26 "Our young son,
my heir, Sigmund,
still lives, but he cannot
flee his enemies' hall.
And your brothers
have cursed themselves
with sorrow and shame
for this treacherous act.

27 "But your brothers
will never have such a son
as mine, even if they
have seven sons apiece.
I know exactly
who has engineered this:
it was for Brynhild alone
that they brought you this misery.

28 "She has more love for me
than for anyone on earth,
but I never gave Gunnar
a reason to think I was untrue.
I respected their marriage,
I respected our oaths.
Let no one ever say
I was his wife's lover."

29 And so Guthrun lost her joy,
and her husband lost his life.
She wrung her hands
in uncontrollable sorrow,
she screamed, and the echo
of her scream echoed far,
and the geese in the field
flew off shrieking.

30 And Brynhild,
daughter of Buthli,
laughed one time
with all her heart,
when, lying in her bed,

she heard the scream
of Guthrun, Sigurth's
broken-hearted wife.

31 King Gunnar
spoke to her grimly:
"You hateful woman,
you aren't laughing
so happily
about good news.
Why are you so pale,
why do you look so deathly,
you creator of cruelties?
I think you're near death.

32 "Will you be
worth it, woman,
when we fight your brother,
Attila, before your eyes?
You will see the wounds
bleed red from your brother,
you will have to tend
to his gruesome injuries."

33 "No one is afraid
of you," said Brynhild.
"I think you've committed
your last murder, and Attila
won't care for your threats.
He will live longer
than you, Gunnar,
and he'll always be stronger.

34 "I will tell you, Gunnar,
you yourself know this well,
how you and your brothers
were brought to these deeds.
When I was young,
without responsibility,
and wealthy, I lived happily
at my brother Attila's home.

35 "I never wished
to marry a husband,
before you sons of Gjuki
rode to our home.
I saw three kings
on horseback—
it would have been better
if you'd stayed at home.

36 "I promised myself
to the man who sat
on Grani's back,
loaded with gold.
His brave eyes
were not like yours,
he did not resemble you
in any way.
But still, you all
had the look of kings.

37 "My brother Attila
told me in private
that I would have no home,
no possessions and no land,
nothing of what
was promised to me,
of the inheritance given
to me in my youth,
unless I allowed myself
to marry a man.

38 "I doubted
for a long time. I wondered
whether I should be a warrior,
leave corpses on the battlefield,
whether I should wear armor
and disobey my brother.
I would have become
famous all over,
I would have killed
and saddened many men.

39 "From then on
our peace was destined to end.
I coveted
the treasures of gold,
the precious things
that Sigurth owned.
I did not covet
the wealth of another man.

40 "I loved only one man,
and never another,
this Valkyrie's heart
was faithful.
My brother Attila will
know this is true,
when he learns
of my death here.

41 "He will learn
that his weary sister
would not live with you, a man
I ought not to have married.
And then he will decide
to avenge my sorrows."

42 Gunnar rose up,
the king of the Niflungs,
and he embraced
his wife around her neck.
Then, one after another,
he and his household
tried with all their heart
to comfort her.

43 But Brynhild turned away
from anyone who came to her,
she would not let anyone
dissuade her from killing herself.

44 Gunnar went to
Hogni and said:

"I want everyone to go to her,
your men and mine,
for there is great need now.
If my wife dies,
more misfortune will come,
and we will be
at the mercy of fate."

45 Hogni, his bold brother,
offered him an answer:
"Let no one try to talk her
out of killing herself,
let the cursed woman
never be reborn!
She was the runt
born to her mother,
always destined
to destroy our happiness,
to bring sorrow
to many men's lives."

46 Unsatisfied,
her husband Gunnar
went to where Brynhild
was giving away her wealth.

47 She searched through
all her belongings,
she killed her maids
and her serving-girls,
she put a suit of armor on.
She was all in a rage,
and finally she put Sigurth's sword
through her own heart.

48 She sank down
to the pillow at her side,
and, mortally wounded,
she began to speak:

49 "Come here,
anyone who wants

to get gold or gifts
from me.
I'll give you all
fine treasures,
fine jewelry and clothes,
fine tapestries."

50 Everyone was silent
when they heard her speak,
till finally they
gave her an answer:
"Enough have died,
we want to live.
Even for serving-girls,
life is more joy than death."

51 But the thoughtful
young queen spoke,
clad in linen, and
she made this response:
"I do not wish
for any of you to be killed,
to follow me for my sake,
unwillingly.

52 "Still, there will be
fewer treasures,
fewer jewels
glowing on your bones,
when your souls
come to Hel with mine.

53 "Sit down, Gunnar!
I will tell you
how your lovely bride
lost her hope of life.
The ship of your life
is still out at sea,
even if mine
is coming into harbor.

54 "You and Guthrun
will reconcile sooner
than you expect.
She'll remarry, and besides
her new husband, she'll have
memories of her first one.

55 "She'll give birth to a girl,
Sigurth's daughter.
She will be brighter
than the clear daylight sun,
brighter than a ray of sunshine.
Svanhild will be her name.

56 "You'll marry Guthrun
to a wealthy man,
but she'll cause the deaths
of many men.
She will not be
willingly married,
but she will
marry Attila,
son of Buthli,
my own brother.

57 "I remember so much,
I remember my misfortunes,
how you betrayed me
and caused my sorrow,
how I was deprived of joy
for the rest of my life.

58 "Soon you will want
to marry my sister,
Oddrun, but Attila
will not marry her to you.
Still the two of you
will meet in secret,
and she will love you
like I should have,

if the two of us
had been truly fated to love.

59 "Attila will pay you back
with a fierce punishment,
he'll lock you inside
a suffocating snake-pit.

60 "But not long after,
it will happen
that Attila himself
will lose his life,
his joy,
and the lives of his sons.
It will be Guthrun
who bloodies their bed
with a sharp blade,
with a vengeful mind.

61 "It would have been better
for Guthrun to follow
her first husband Sigurth
and die with him.
But she was never
given good advice,
and she did not have
courage like mine.

62 "I speak in pain now,
but I know that she
will not lose her life
for killing my brother.
The high waves
will carry her
to the lands
of King Jonaker.

63 "She will have sons
with Jonaker,
and raise Svanhild there.

She will marry off Svanhild,
her daughter
and Sigurth's.

64 "The advice of Bikki
will cause Guthrun grief,
when Jormunrekk
kills her daughter Svanhild.
Sigurth's family
will come to an end
when Guthrun weeps
for its last descendant.

65 "I will make
one last request,
the last request
of my entire life:
Let my funeral pyre
be high and broad,
let there be
sufficient room
for everyone
who has died with Sigurth.

66 "Build up the pyre
with tents and shields,
with precious dyed cloths
and foreign treasures.
Let Sigurth, that Hunnish hero,
burn alongside me.

67 "And at Sigurth's
other side,
burn my servants,
adorn their bodies with jewels.
Place two of them at his head,
and two of his hawks,
then the funeral
will be arranged properly.

68 “And between him and me,
place the precious blade
of his sharp sword,
just like it lay between us
the last time
he and I shared a bed,
when we pledged
to become husband and wife.

69 “Do as I say, and
it won’t be as if some man
simply died at his home,
with a single ring to his name.
If he has such
a following with him in Hel,
no one will think
that he died a poor man.

70 “He’ll be accompanied
by five slavegirls,
and eight slavemen
captured from good families,
all the slavemen given to me
as a young girl by my father;
that was how
Buthli honored his daughter.

71 “I have spoken a long time,
and I would speak longer,
but the sword in my side
will not give me more time.
My voice fails me,
my wounds sting,
I have spoken the truth,
and now I must die.”

Helreith Brynhildar (Brynhild's Ride to Hel)

Helreith Brynhildar ("Brynhild's Ride to Hel") follows closely on the death of Brynhild in *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma,* describing Brynhild's encounters in Hel following her death on Sigurth's funeral pyre.

Helreith Brynhildar

When Brynhild was dead, they built two funeral pyres. The first was for Sigurth, and it burned first. But Brynhild was placed on another pyre, and her body was on a wagon draped with expensive cloths. It is said that she came driving in this wagon along the road to Hel, and she passed through a farm where a certain giant woman lived. The giant woman said:

1 "You don't get to
ride through
my rocky lands,
through my pastures.
It would be more fitting
for you to sew a tapestry
than to come here to visit
another woman's husband.

2 "Why are you visiting
my home
from the land above,
you two-faced woman?
You have fed
human blood
to the wolves,
cursed by you."

Brynhild said:

3 "Don't scold me,
you bride from the stones,
even if I did once
go on Viking raids.
I think people would say

that I'm the nobler of us two,
if our ancestry
were compared."

The giant woman said:

4 "You were Brynhild,
daughter of Buthli,
born into the world
for the worst luck.
You have destroyed
the children of Gjuki,
changed forever
their once-happy home."

Brynhild said:

5 "You are unwise,
but I am wise in my wagon.
I will tell you in brief,
if you want to know
how Gjuki's sons
made me into
a loveless wife
and an oathbreaker.

6 "Everyone who knew me
called me by the name
'Hild in the Helmet'
at home in Hlymdalir.
A man was named Agnar,
brother of Autha;
no one would ever
help him in any way.

7 "A brave king
ordered the feather-cloaks
of us eight Valkyries
to be carried beneath an oak.
I was twelve years old,
if you want to know,
when I gave
a young prince my oath.

8 "Then I let an old warrior,
Hjalmgunnar
of the Gothic lands,
go to Hel.
I gave victory to Agnar,
Autha's young brother,
and Odin was intolerably
angry at me for this.

9 "He closed me up
behind red and white shields,
set them in a circle around me
in Skatalund.
He said only a man
who could never
know fear
could break my sleep.

10 "And around my
south-facing hall,
he kindled
high-flaming fires;
only one man
could ride over the flames—
the one who brought me the gold
that had lain beneath Fafnir.

11 "Then that good man,
that sharer of rings,
came riding on Grani
to my foster-father's hall.
He alone, the Viking Sigurth,
seemed better to me
than every other man
at that Danish court.

12 "The two of us
slept together in one bed,
not as lovers, but as if
he were my brother—
for eight nights

neither of us
laid so much as a hand
upon the other.

13 "Guthrun, daughter
of Gjuki, mocked me,
she said I had slept
in the arms of Sigurth.
And when she said it,
I realized the horrible truth
of how they wooed me—
they had tricked me.

14 "Men and women
will go on living
for far too many days,
for far too little joy.
But as for me and Sigurth,
we will never be parted,
never again after death!
Now sink back down, giant."

Drap Niflunga (The Death of the Niflungs)

Drap Niflunga (literally "The Killing of the Niflungs") is not a poem but a brief prose note that summarizes the death of Gunnar and Hogni, an event that precedes the action of the next poems, and which is related in detail in the poem *Atlakvitha*.

Drap Niflunga

Then Gunnar and Hogni took all the gold that had been Fafnir's. They were not at peace with Attila, because he blamed them for his sister Brynhild's death. But they made peace by giving Attila their sister Guthrun in marriage. They gave Guthrun a magical potion of forgetfulness before she consented to marry Attila. Attila's sons with Guthrun were Erp and Eitil, and Guthrun had her daughter Svanhild by Sigurth.

King Attila later invited Gunnar and Hogni to visit him, and sent his messenger named Vingi or Knefroth. Guthrun suspected Attila meant to harm her brothers, so she sent a message in runes that said they should not come, and as a sign she sent Hogni the ring Andvaranaut with a wolf's hair tied to it.

Gunnar had wooed Oddrun, Attila's sister, but Attila had not given her to him in marriage. So Gunnar had married Glaumvor, and Hogni had married Kostbera, and their sons were Solar and Snaevar and Gjuki.

When Gunnar and Hogni came to Attila, Guthrun asked her sons to beg for her brothers' lives, but they refused. Hogni's heart was cut out, and Gunnar was placed in a pit of snakes. He played a harp and lulled the snakes to sleep, but one of them bit him down to the liver.

Atlakvitha (The Fall of the House of Attila)

Atlakvitha (literally "Poem of Attila") is probably the oldest poem in the Poetic Edda and one of the most memorable and poignant of the heroic poems. It tells of the visit of Gunnar and Hogni to Attila, of their murder by Attila, and finally of Guthrun's vengeance on Attila when she kills her sons by him. Sigurth is never mentioned, though Gunnar and Hogni do own a great treasure, which the author of *Volsunga saga* understood as Fafnir's. Read in isolation, the poem seems to imply that Guthrun dies as well as Attila at the end, though the following poems (as well as *Volsunga saga*) tell that she lived.

In the manuscript, *Atlakvitha* is placed after three poems with stories that take place after that of *Atlakvitha*: the poems *Guthrunarkvitha II*, *Guthrunarkvitha III*, and *Oddrunargratr*. In this translation, I have moved *Atlakvitha* before these three, to make the story more chronologically cohesive for those who wish to read the Edda from start to finish. As mentioned in the Introduction, the *Codex Regius* also includes one poem after *Atlakvitha*, called *Atlamal*, which is much longer and much later, and which tells substantially the same story but with many later additions. *Atlamal* is thus excluded from this translation because of its redundancy with *Atlakvitha*.

Atlakvitha

1 Attila sent a message to Gunnar,
son of Gjuki;
he picked Knefroth,
a good man, to take it.
At the end he came
to Gunnar's hall,
where there were warm seats
by the fire, and good beer.

2 Gjuki's sons were drinking
when the silent Huns came in;
the Huns and Goths
exchanged angry glances.

But Knefroth the Hun
sat down on a bench,
and in a cold voice
he said to them:

3 "Attila sent me here
on an errand;
I have ridden here
on a fast mare through Mirkwood.
Attila told me to invite you,
Gunnar and Hogni,
to visit his own hall,
and leave your helmets at home.

4 "Attila will give you shields
and well-crafted spears;
he will give you golden helmets
of the Hunnish style.
You'll be given silver saddles,
fine red cloaks,
spearpoints, javelins,
and fast horses.

5 "He will let you have the wide,
fine valley Gnitaheith,
and steel weapons,
and golden ships.
He will let you have great treasures,
lands by the Dnieper,
and the famous forest
that men call Mirkwood."

6 Gunnar turned his head to Hogni,
his brother, and said:
"What do you advise,
little brother, when we hear such?
I don't think there's any
gold in Gnitaheith
that we don't have
the equal of right here."

7 Hogni said: "We have seven halls,
each full of swords;
the hilt of each sword
is made of gold.
I ride the best horse,
carry the sharpest sword,
have the best-made bow,
and wear a golden suit of armor,
I wear a Caesar's
bright helmet and shield—
any one of these is better
than everything the Huns own.

8 "And what could Guthrun mean,
when she sends a ring
with a wolf's hair tied to it?
I think she is warning us:
A wolf's hair breaks the circle
of this fine golden ring,
and a wolf awaits us
on our journey, if we take it."

9 It was not the advice of his brother,
nor of his kinsmen,
nor of his wizards,
nor of his counselors nor his top men;
but Gunnar alone decided,
like a famous king should,
and he spoke in his meadhall
with swelling courage:

10 "Get up, servant,
send around the golden cups!
Let the boys
have a drink of mead.

11 "A wolf, a predator
from the forest,
will have my
inheritance if I die.

Pale-pelted bears
will eat our food
and fight our dogs,
if I don't come back."

12 Bold fighters,
Gunnar's warriors,
escorted the Huns
out of Gunnar's hall.
Hogni's young son
said to his father:
"Stay well and wise,
wherever your courage takes you!"

13 Those brave men
rushed across the mountains
on swift, eager horses,
through unmapped Mirkwood.
Hunland trembled
where those bold men rode;
they drove their well-trained horses
on the green plains.

14 They saw the hall of Attila,
where Huns stood guard;
men patrolled
outside that high hall.
That Hunnish hall
was full of seats for drinking,
of iron-bound shields
and yellow shields,
of spearpoints and javelins,
and there sat Attila
drinking wine;
his best guards sat outside
to ensure Gunnar and Hogni
would not come in
with flashing spears,
meaning to start a fight.

15 Guthrun went to meet
her brothers when they came in;
she greeted them both,
she was gloomy, and drank little.
She said: "You're unwise.
What can you get from fighting
the Huns, when you're already
so rich? Run for your life!

16 "Brothers, it would have been
better if you had come in armor,
in the helmets you left at home,
if you had sat in your saddles
on a warm bright day,
taken the land of Attila,
and made corpses of these Huns—
if you had let their Norns weep,
and given the Valkyries
a hard day's work,
had finished off Attila himself
in a snake-pit.
But now the snake-pit
waits for you."

17 Gunnar said: "It's too late now,
sister, to gather an army.
It's a long way back
to our brave army,
over the mountains
and the river Rhine."

18 The Huns seized Gunnar
and put him in chains—
they'd invited him in friendship,
but they tied him up.

19 Hogni didn't wait;
he killed seven with his sword,
and shoved an eighth
into the fire.

That is how a bold man
should treat his enemies—
the way Hogni did,
before he was chained like Gunnar.

20 They asked King Gunnar
if he wanted to live,
if he would buy his life
by telling where his gold was.

21 Gunnar said: "First,
I must see Hogni's bloody heart
torn out of his living chest
and placed in my hand.
Go, take a sword or knife,
and cut it out of him."

22 But they cut out the heart
of Hjalli the slave,
and put it on a platter,
and took that to Gunnar.

23 Gunnar, that lord of men,
was not fooled. He said:
"Here I have the heart
of the coward Hjalli!
It is nothing like
my brave brother Hogni's heart.
This one trembles
where it lies on the plate—
and it trembled twice as much
in the coward's chest."

24 Hogni laughed
when they cut out his heart.
He was a killer;
he would never weep.
They put his heart on a plate
and took it to Gunnar.

25 Then Gunnar,
famous leader of spearmen, said:
"Here I have the heart
of my bold brother Hogni!
It is nothing
like the coward Hjalli's heart.
This one barely trembles
where it lies on the plate—
and it never trembled at all
when it was in his chest.

26 "Very well, Attila,
now your eyes shall never see
where I have hidden
the treasure of Fafnir.

27 "I, the King of the Goths,
am the only one who knows
its hiding place,
now that bold Hogni lies dead.
I was always in doubt
while the two of us lived,
but now I know the secret's safe
since I alone live.

28 "Now no one will take
that treasure from its hiding place,
and it will lie forever
beneath the famous river Rhine,
where the cursed rings
will shine beneath the current
rather than on the hands
of the Huns' children!"

29 Attila said: "Put him in the wagon.
The prisoner can't move from his chains."

30 King Attila,
Gunnar's brother-in-law,
rode his horse Glaum,
a sword at his side.

Noble-born Guthrun
spoke to him, stricken,
weeping in his hall:

31 "You deserve what's coming to you,
Attila, for breaking
the oaths you and Gunnar
swore to each other long ago;
you swore by the sun to be faithful,
and by Odin's hill,
you swore by the ring of Ull,
on the day we were wed."

32 Nevertheless the horse
brought Gunnar on the wagon
to the place prepared
for his punishment.

33 They placed Gunnar,
still alive, in the snake-pit;
many of the Huns
were there to watch.
But Gunnar sat in that pit,
surrounded by vipers
and, still feeling bold,
he played the harp.
He plucked the strings,
that brave man—
that is how to protect
a treasure from one's enemies.

34 Then Attila,
on a wild horse,
rode back to his land
after the murder.
There was a great noise
of many men on horses,
his men sang battle-songs
as they came back home.

35 Guthrun approached Attila
at the feast,
with a gilded cup in hand,
and she presented it to her husband:
"Accept this drink, husband,
here in your hall,
in glad memory of your wife's
departed kinsmen."

36 Attila's halls echoed
as toasts were drunk;
all the Huns
were gathered there in his hall,
long-bearded fighters,
they all came in for the feast.

37 Then lovely Guthrun was hostess,
she brought everyone a drink,
the hard-minded lady
made her guests drunk;
and then she spoke
hateful words to Attila:

38 "Warrior—
you have chewed
your own sons'
raw, bloody hearts,
mixed with a little honey—
you have eaten murdered
humans as little treats,
and sent the plate around your hall.

39 "Our little boys,
Erp and Eitil,
will never again
run up, drunk,
and embrace your knees.
You will never
see them
make a spear,

or comb a mane,
or sit atop a war-horse."

40 The people in the hall
screamed, made a frightful noise,
their happiness turned to misery,
and all the Huns wept.
All of them except Guthrun,
for she never wept,
neither when her brothers
died fighting like bears,
nor when she gave death
to the boys she'd given life.

41 The beautiful wife of Attila
now started giving gifts,
she bestowed golden rings
on Attila's warriors.
She went blithely on,
distributing shining gold,
and burdened the Huns
with more riches.

42 Meanwhile Attila,
the taste of his sons' flesh still fresh,
sat, no weapon in hand—
he'd never suspected Guthrun.
He thought of how happy they'd been,
back when they had been
accustomed to embrace
in front of everyone.

43 Later she reddened
their sheets with his blood,
held a sword in her murderous hand
and let the dogs go free.
Then she barricaded the doors
and set the hall on fire—
the Huns died in the flames,
and her brothers were avenged.

44 She gave all the Huns
to the burning flames
for the murder of Gunnar
and Hogni in Mirkwood.
The old timbers cracked and fell,
their temples fell down,
all the homes of the Huns burned,
and their wives inside burned,
all of them fell, suffocating,
and succumbed to the hot flames.

45 The story is now fully told,
and no woman in armor
has avenged her brothers
in a like manner since.
Gorgeous Guthrun killed
her own husband
and her two sons,
before she herself fell dead.

Guthrunarkvitha II (The Second Poem of Guthrun)

In *Guthrunarkvitha II* ("The Second Poem of Guthrun"), Guthrun's husband Attila has killed her brothers Gunnar and Hogni, but she has not yet avenged them (thus contradicting the story of her immediate vengeance told in *Atlakvitha*). Guthrun speaks with a king named Thjothrek, telling him about how her brothers killed Sigurth, and about the tragedies that have befallen her since, including the murder of her brothers by Attila. The poem is fairly straightforward, but the reader should keep in mind that Guthrun is recollecting events told in previous poems, often with slight differences and extra details. For example, Guthrun recalls that her brothers killed Sigurth out of jealousy (Brynhild is not mentioned, except as Attila's sister), and that Guthrun then wandered away from home, spending three and a half years in the company of Thora, daughter of King Hakon of Denmark, before her brothers and mother found her again and gave her a magical potion to make her forget Sigurth and his murder.

Guthrunarkvitha II

King Thjothrek was with Attila and had lost nearly all his men. Thjothrek and Guthrun spoke of their sorrows to one another. This is what Guthrun told Thjothrek:

1 "My mother gave me birth
in a royal home.
I was beautiful, a famous woman.
I loved my brothers well,
till my father Gjuki
adorned me with gold,
wrapped me in gold,
and gave me to Sigurth.

2 "And my Sigurth,
compared to my brothers,
was like a garlic stalk
that towers above the grass,
or like a tall stag
that towers over other beasts,

or like ember-hued gold
next to tarnished silver.

3 "But my brothers
hated that my husband
was a far greater man
than they were.
They could not sleep,
they could barely think,
till they brought about
the death of Sigurth.

4 "I heard weapons clash.
Grani came home,
but Sigurth was not
riding him.
All the horses
ran with sweat;
the murderers
rode them hard.

5 "I wept, and I went
to speak with Grani,
to ask Sigurth's horse
for news. Grani wept, too,
he sank to his knees,
his head drooped in the grass;
the horse knew
his lord had fallen.

6 "I mulled it over so long,
I doubted it so long,
before I asked
Gunnar about Sigurth.

7 "Gunnar's head drooped,
and Hogni told me
of the wounds
that caused Sigurth's death:
'Your husband, who killed
Gotthorm, lies dead

across the river,
left as food for the wolves.

8 "'Look for Sigurth
on the road to the south—
listen for
calling ravens,
screaming eagles,
howling wolves,
all enjoying a meal
of your dead husband.'

9 "'Oh Hogni,
why do you want to tell me,
a grieving widow,
such horrors?
I hope ravens will eat
your own heart,
far away, across
lands no one knows of!'

10 "Then Hogni
answered me,
that hard-hearted man,
he spoke with real sorrow:
'It will only be
another reason for you to weep,
sister, when the ravens
eat my own heart.'

11 "I left on my own,
and went into the woods,
to find what the wolves
had left of Sigurth.
I held back my tears—
I didn't wring my hands
or cry out
like other women,
when I sat and starved
next to my Sigurth.

12 "That night
was hatefully dark
when I sat alone,
heartbroken, over Sigurth's corpse;
I would have thought
the wolves merciful
if they had
torn me apart,
or if I had been burned
like a pile of birch twigs.

13 "I departed for the mountains,
I wandered five days and nights
till I came to the high-roofed
hall of Half.

14 "I stayed with Thora,
daughter of King Hakon,
in Denmark
for three and a half years.
She tried to comfort me,
she sewed scenes of
southern halls and
Danish swans for me in gold.

15 "The two of us
sewed tapestries,
we sewed pictures
with great skill.
We sewed warriors fighting,
and red shields,
and helmets and swords,
and proud bands of soldiers.

16 "We sewed Sigmund's ships
departing from shore,
we sewed golden helmets,
tall ships,
we showed in pictures
how Sigar and Siggeir

fought in the south,
on the island of Fyn.

17 "Then Grimhild,
my mother,
queen of the Goths,
learned what I was doing.
She stopped her own sewing,
she summoned her sons
and she asked
which of them
would compensate me
threefold for my son's loss,
who would repay me
for my husband's loss.

18 "Gunnar was willing
to offer gold
to put the matter to rest,
and Hogni was, too.
Then Grimhild told them
that whoever was willing
must saddle a horse,
and fill a wagon,
ride to me
with his hawks,
shoot arrows
from his bow.

19 "Valdar the Dane
went with them, and Jarizleif,
Eymoth was the third,
and Jarizkar.
Those handsome
Langobardic kings
came in,
they had red cloaks,
tailored shirts of chainmail,
they had pointed helmets,
they had swords at their belts,
and their hair was chestnut.

20 "Each of them wanted
to give me treasures,
to give me treasures,
and speak pleasant words;
they wanted to know
if I would give my brothers
peace and forgiveness—
but I was still suspicious.

21 "Then Grimhild brought me
a drinking-horn.
The drink was eerily cold,
and I drank it, and forgot everything.
That drink had been
enchanted with the earth's might,
with the cold sea
and the blood of her sons.

22 "There were all sorts
of runes in that horn,
carved there and bloodied,
I couldn't read them.
There was a long sea serpent
carved on the horn,
there was an ear of wheat,
there were animal guts.

23 "Many evil things
were mixed into that beer,
the blood of all beasts,
and burned acorns,
and eagle's blood,
and intestines, and
boiled pig's liver, all because
she wanted to make me forget.

24 "And I forgot it all,
when I drank that poison beer.
In that hall, I forgot
my husband's murder.
And three kings

came to speak to me,
but my mother
spoke up first, and said:

25 "'Guthrun, my daughter,
I give you gold,
and all sorts of property,
golden rings,
the halls of Hlothver,
and rich tapestries
as inheritance
from your father.

26 "'And more:
Handy Hunnish girls
who'll make golden tapestries
to please you.
And more: You alone will have
the wealth of Buthli—
you will be adorned with gold,
and married to Attila.'

27 "I said, 'I don't want
to marry this man,
I don't want Brynhild's brother
for my husband.
It would not suit me
to marry Attila,
the son of Buthli,
nor to bear his children.'

28 "Grimhild said, 'Don't blame
Attila for your loss,
we were the ones
who did you wrong.
When you have sons
with Attila, you'll feel
as happy as if Sigmund
and Sigurth both lived.'

29 "I said, 'Mother, I cannot
find joy in life,
I have no wish
to marry Attila,
since the ravens
and the wolves
drank the blood
from my Sigurth's heart.'

30 "Grimhild said, 'Attila is
a noble-born man;
he is the foremost of kings
in every respect.
You will marry him,
and be his wife till old age—
or you will be forever
without a husband, if you refuse.'

31 "I said, 'Do not
plead the case
of this hateful family
to me, not so eagerly.
Attila will cause
Gunnar great harm;
he will cut
the heart of Hogni out.
And then I will not rest
till I have taken
the life
of my husband.'

32 "Grimhild wept
when she responded,
when she heard
of the death of her sons,
of the great wounds
to her sons:

33 "'I will give you still
more lands and men—
have Vinbjorg and Valbjorg,

if you will take them!
Take them for yours forever
and enjoy them, daughter!'

34 "I said, 'I will take
this king for my husband,
since my own nearest kin
have forced this choice on me.
This man does not take me
by my own free will;
the sons of my brothers' killer
will not be safe from me.'

35 "Soon each of the warriors
mounted up on horseback,
and I, the royal bride,
was driven away in a wagon.
We rode seven days
through a cold land,
and the next seven
we sailed over the sea,
and in the next seven days
we walked on dry land.

36 "Then guardsmen
in their high tower
drew up the gates,
and we rode into the town.

37 "Attila watched me closely;
I must have seemed
full of hate to him,
thinking of what I had foreseen.

38 "Attila said, 'The Norns
have sent me a bad dream.'
He said that he wanted me to
interpret his nightmare:
'I thought I saw you,
Guthrun, Gjuki's daughter,

stab me with a sword
treacherously.'

39 "I said, 'When you dream
of iron, it's an omen of fire,
to dream of a woman's wrath
is an omen of pride and conceit.
I'll add wood to the fire
to chase away the evil,
I will gently doctor you,
though I hate you.'

40 "Attila said, 'I thought
I saw branches burn,
branches that I wanted
to let grow in my garden;
they were severed from their roots
and reddened in blood,
they were brought to my table,
and offered to me for food.

41 "'I thought that some hawks
flew from my hand,
they flew unhappily
to a horrible final end.
I thought I ate their hearts,
chewed them up with honey—
I was sorrowful,
I was covered in blood.

42 "'I thought that I let
some dogs loose from my hands,
and they both
howled joylessly.
I thought I saw
their flesh die and rot,
and I was forced
to eat them.'

43 "I said, 'This means that
men will sacrifice,
cut the heads
from some white beasts.
Those sacrificial victims
will be kept a few nights,
and before the dawn
the men will eat them.'

44 "Attila said, 'I lay in bed,
but I could not sleep,
my sleep was restless;
I remember it clearly.'"

Guthrunarkvitha III (The Third Poem of Guthrun)

Like *Guthrunarkvitha II*, this poem takes place in a timeline in which Guthrun's brothers Gunnar and Hogni have been killed by her husband Attila, but she has not yet avenged them. In this short poem, she has been seen talking with Thjothrek (as she does in the preceding *Guthrunarkvitha II*), and this leads Herkja, a concubine of Attila's, to insinuate to Attila that Guthrun and Thjothrek are sleeping together (medieval Norse society placed a premium on the sexual fidelity of wives but not husbands). Guthrun is proven innocent by the ordeal of the boiling kettle. In this ordeal, a stone is placed at the bottom of a kettle that is full of boiling water and specially blessed for this purpose; the accused woman must stick her hand into the kettle and pull the stone out without any signs of injury. If her arm is burned in the kettle, she is presumed guilty.

Guthrunarkvitha III

Herkja was the name of one of Attila's servingwomen; she had been his concubine. She told Attila that she had seen Guthrun and Thjothrek together, and this made Attila very unhappy. Then Guthrun said:

1 "WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU,
Attila, son of Buthli?
Are you sad in spirit?
Why do you never laugh?
It would seem better
to your noble men,
if you would speak with them,
and look at me."

2 Attila said, "It worries me,
Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,
what Herkja said to me
here in my hall:
that you and Thjothrek
slept together

under one roof,
that you played in the sheets."

3 Guthrun said, "I will swear
oaths to you about this,
I'll swear on that holy
white stone,
that Thjothrek
and I have never
had relations
as men and women do.

4 "I might have embraced
that lord of warriors,
that fearless man,
one time,
but our conversation
was about another matter,
when the two of us
whispered about our sorrows.

5 "Thjothrek came here
with thirty men,
and he is the only one
of those thirty now living.
And as for me, you killed
my brothers, and their warriors,
you took all my family
away from me.

6 "Send for King Saxi
from the south,
he'll know how to bless
the kettle for the trial by ordeal."

7 Seven hundred men
came to Attila's hall
to see the king's wife
pass the ordeal of the kettle.

8 Guthrun said, "Gunnar
will not come to me,
I cannot call on Hogni,
I'll never see my brothers again.
Hogni would have avenged
this insult with his sword.
But now I must prove
my innocence on my own."

9 She thrust her beautiful hand
to the bottom of the boiling kettle,
and she took the gemstones
that lay at the bottom.
"Now look, everyone!
I am proven innocent
in the holiest of ways,
and look how the kettle boils!"

10 Then Attila laughed
with a whole heart
when he saw Guthrun's
hands were uninjured.
"Now Herkja
will have to brave the ordeal,
the one who insulted
Guthrun's good name!"

11 No one pitied
Herkja, when they saw
her hands burned
in the boiling kettle.
And they drowned her
in a stinking swamp—
she got that for causing
Guthrun's trouble.

Oddrunargratr (The Weeping of Oddrun)

This poem, which was probably composed fairly late, involves Oddrun, a sister of Brynhild and Attila who had an ill-fated love affair with Gunnar. In this poem, Oddrun assists another woman named Borgny in giving birth to twins, and then Oddrun proceeds to tell her tragic love story. The poem suggests that this affair was part of Attila's motivation in killing Gunnar, and that Borgny's otherwise unknown lover Vilmund was the killer of Hogni (st. 8).

Oddrunargratr

Concerning Borgny and Oddrun

A king was named Heithrek, his daughter was named Borgny, and her lover was named Vilmund. Borgny struggled to give birth till Oddrun, who was Attila's sister and Gunnar's lover, came to her. This poem is about that story.

1 I HEARD TELL
in old sagas
that a woman came
to Hunland,
to do what no other woman
on earth could do,
to assist Heithrek's daughter
in childbirth.

2 Oddrun, Attila's sister,
had learned that
this woman had
a hard pregnancy.
She went out
for her horse
in the stable,
set her black saddle on him.

3 She rode over
the dark swamps,
she came to the high hall,

and there she dismounted.
She took the saddle
from the worn-out horse,
she walked across the hall
to its end,
and then she said
this to the people there:

4 "What is the news?
What is the latest
that has happened
in the land of the Huns?"
A servant said: "Borgny
is pregnant, and in pain.
She is your friend, Oddrun,
and needs your help."

5 Oddrun said, "Who
is the father?
Who caused Borgny
to have this difficulty?"

6 The servant said, "Vilmund
was the name of her lover;
he spread the warm blankets
for the girl,
hidden from her father
for five winters."

7 Nothing more
was said of this.
Oddrun sat gently
at Borgny's side.
She sang loud,
she sang powerfully,
she sang great spells
for Borgny.

8 A boy and a girl
were born to Borgny;
two healthy children

for the killer of Hogni.
When their weakened mother
first regained speech,
this is what she said
first of all:

9 "May all the goddesses,
Freyja and Frigg
and all the others,
help you, Oddrun,
since you have saved
me from death in childbirth."

10 Oddrun said,
"I did not come here
because I thought
you were worth my help.
I have sworn that I
will always give help
when it is needed
to those who share
my noble rank,
and I honor my oath."

11 Then Oddrun
sat down, and began
to recount the troubles
of her long, sad life:

12 "I was brought up
in princely halls;
most people were happy
at my father Buthli's court.
I enjoyed carefree
happiness and wealth
for five joyful years
till my father died.

13 "The last thing
my father said
before he died

was this:
He said they should provide
a dowry of gold for me,
send me south
to marry Gunnar.

14 "He said a greater woman
would never be born,
unless fate had some
disaster in store for me."

15 Borgny said, "You are mad,
Oddrun, you're out of your wits,
if you come to me
to speak these words in anger.
I have been like
a devoted cousin to you,
as if we were daughters
of two brothers."

16 Oddrun said, "I still
remember what you said
one evening, when I served
a drink to Gunnar.
You said no other
unmarried woman
would make such a mistake
with a man, except for me.

17 "While Brynhild
wove in her room,
she had power over
men and lands.
And there was a loud noise—
earth and heaven shook,
when Sigurth came
to her tower.

18 "He fought a battle
with his excellent sword,
and the tower was broken,

and Brynhild was his.
But the peace
did not last long
before she learned
of all their trickery.

19 "She devoted herself
to taking revenge,
and we've all lived through
enough of the results.
The rumor of it
has traveled the whole world,
everyone knows she went
to Hel alongside Sigurth.

20 "But I fell
in love with Gunnar.
I loved that warrior
like Brynhild should have.
But our father had given
a helmet to Brynhild,
he said long before
that she would be a Valkyrie.

21 "They offered
Attila golden rings,
he would get no small price
if he married me to Gunnar.
They offered him
fifteen farms, and even a part
of Fafnir's treasure, if he
would consent to the marriage.

22 "But Attila said
he would never accept
money for me
from Gunnar.
I begged my brother
with my head bowed low,
but my love for Gunnar
could not win him over.

23 “Many of my kinsmen
spoke against me,
they said they had witnessed
our secret meetings.
But my brother Attila
said I had no faults,
he said that I
had done no wrong.

24 “But you should
never deny such things
before a witness,
not when love is concerned.

25 “Attila sent
his messengers
through Mirkwood
to spy on me.
And they found us
where they never should have—
they found me and Gunnar
beneath the same blanket.

26 “We offered
precious rings
to those men,
begged them not to tell Attila.
But they hurried home
swiftly, eagerly,
and they told Attila
about our forbidden love.

27 “But they hid the affair
from Guthrun;
she already had guessed
the half of it.

28 “What a noise we heard
when Gunnar and Hogni came!
They rode their golden-hoofed
horses to Attila’s hall.

The Huns cut out
Hogni's heart,
and they put Gunnar
in a pit of serpents.

29 "I was gone
at the time,
I was serving Geirmund
his fill of drink.
But clever Gunnar
played a harp,
he thought I would
come to his aid,
the noble-born king I loved
thought I'd come to him.

30 "I was at Hlesey,
but I heard
him playing his harp
with all his war-hardened courage.
I told the serving-girls
to get ready,
I wanted to save the life
of my love, King Gunnar.

31 "We set sail
over the sea,
we came to where I saw
the home of Attila.

32 "Then a miserable
mother of vipers
came forth, slithering—
I wish she would rot!
But that snake
bit famous Gunnar
in the heart, before I could come—
I could not help my lover.

33 "I often wonder,
Borgny, fellow woman,

how I continue
to hold on to life,
since I loved
that madly daring
prince of warriors
like I love my own life.

34 "Well, you sat, and
you listened while I told you
all the terrible troubles
I and others have endured.
We all live according to
what seems right to us."
That is the end
of the weeping of Oddrun.

Guthrunarhvot (The Inciting of Guthrun's Sons)

According to *Guthrunarhvot* (literally, "The Inciting by Guthrun"), Guthrun attempted to drown herself in the sea after she killed Attila. But instead of dying, she was carried by the waves to the kindgom of Jonaker. Later, when Svanhild, Guthrun's daughter by Sigurth, was promised in marriage to King Jormunrekk and then killed by him, Guthrun incited her sons by Jonaker to avenge Svanhild, and had a funeral pyre kindled for herself. As usual, the prose introduction is from the manuscript.

Guthrunarhvot

Guthrun walked to the ocean after she killed Attila, and then she went out into the waves and wanted to kill herself, but she could not drown. She was brought by the waves over the fjord to the lands of King Jonaker, and he married her; their sons were Sorli, Erp, and Hamthir. Svanhild, Guthrun's daughter by Sigurth, also grew up there, and she was promised to the mighty king Jormunrekk. One of Jormunrekk's advisors was Bikki, who advised the king's son, Randver, to have his way with the bride. Bikki then told this to the king. The king had Randver hanged, and Svanhild trampled to death by horses. When Guthrun learned of this, she spoke to her sons.

1 I HEARD
the worst news,
awful words spoken
in heavy sorrow,
when grim Guthrun
incited her sons
with bitter words
to seek vengeance:

2 "Why are you sitting here,
sleeping away your lives?
Why are you not too sad
to chat happily like this?
You know that Jormunrekk
took your sister,
as young as she was,

and had her trampled to pieces
by horses, some black, some white,
some gray, some tame,
some Gothic,
on a common road.

3 "You boys are not like
my brother Gunnar,
you are not as brave
as Hogni was.
The two of you
would avenge her,
if you had the bravery
of my brothers,
or the courage
of the Hunnish kings."

4 Then the brave
Hamthir spoke:
"You did not praise
Hogni's courage
when your brothers
woke Sigurth
from his last sleep,
when your blue-and-white
striped bed sheets turned red
in your husband's blood.

5 "You achieved vengeance
for both of your brothers
in an awful, cruel way
when you murdered your sons.
Had they lived,
I think we could all
have avenged our sister
on Jormunrekk.

6 "But bring us the armor
of the Hunnish kings!
You have challenged us
to seek a battle."

7 Guthrun, laughing,
gave her sons
the treasures of kings
which she kept in her room.
She brought her sons
long coats of chainmail.
They boldly set themselves
in their saddles.

8 Then the brave
Hamthir spoke:
"I will never again
come back from battle
and return to Gothic lands,
except as a fallen corpse.
Mother, you'll drink
at the funeral for us all,
for your sons
and Svanhild alike."

9 Guthrun, daughter of
Gjuki, went weeping,
and sat on the road
in sorrow.
She counted,
with tear-streaked cheeks,
the many varieties
of her life's sorrows:

10 "I've had three homes,
three hearths,
three husbands
who took me home.
And of all of them,
Sigurth was the best,
the one who was killed
by my own brothers.

11 "I was made to forget
my heavy sorrows,
but nonetheless

I was greatly offended
when my brothers
married me to Attila.

12 "I called to my bold
young sons in secret.
I never did any worse evil
than when I cut off
the heads
of my own heirs.

13 "I walked to the sea,
I hated the Norns,
I wanted to throw off
what they had in store for me.
But the high waves
lifted me, never drowning me,
took me to a new land
where I lived yet longer.

14 "So for the third time
I shared the bridal bed
with a king. But I liked it
better the first time.
I had his children,
I gave birth to his heirs,
boys to inherit
after Jonaker.

15 "Lady-servants
sat around Svanhild,
and I loved her most
of all my children.
Svanhild seemed to me
like a beautiful
ray of sunlight
come into my home.

16 "I gave her gold
and precious clothes,
before I sent her as a wife

to King Jormunrekk,
and of all my sorrows
the very worst is
when I think of
Svanhild's fine hair
trampled into the mud
under horses' hooves.

17 "And my bitterest memory
is of when my brothers
robbed Sigurth of victory,
and killed him in our bed.
And my grimmest
is the memory of Gunnar
bitten to death
by shimmering-scaled serpents,
and my most painful
is the memory of Hogni,
that boldest of kings,
with his heart cut out
while he still lived.

18 "I remember so much grief.
Oh, Sigurth, mount up
on your white horse!
Ride to me here
on swift-footed Grani!
I sit here without
a daughter or daughter-in-law
who could comfort
me with good gifts.

19 "Do you remember, Sigurth,
what we said to one another,
sitting together, the two of us,
on the bed we shared?
My brave husband,
we swore that either you
would come back to me from Hel,
or else I would join you there.

20 "Now, noble men,
build a high funeral pyre
out of oak wood, stoke it
till the flames reach the sky!
Let fire burn
my sob-wracked chest,
let flame melt the sorrows
that choke my heart.

21 "Let any noble man
think his bad luck is better,
let any well-bred lady
say her sorrows aren't so bad,
when they have heard
all my misfortune told!"

Hamthismal (The Tale of Hamthir)

Hamthismal ("Words of Hamthir") tells much the same story as *Guthrunarhvot*, with some differences of detail. Guthrun encourages Hamthir and Sorli, her sons by Jonaker, to avenge their half-sister Svanhild (her daughter by Sigurth) on Jormunrekk, a king of the Goths. The boys ride off to do the deed, accompanied by their half-brother Erp (son of Jonaker and a concubine). Hamthir and Sorli kill Erp before they reach their destination, misunderstanding his cryptic promise of help. Hamthir and Sorli fight well against the Goths, and even cut Jormunrekk's arms and legs off, but Jormunrekk finally instructs his men to stone them to death, since he knows the sons of Guthrun are impervious to iron and steel. The two brothers regret killing Erp then, as he would have decapitated Jormunrekk (a stanza may be missing in which Erp was assigned this specific duty).

Hamthismal, the last poem in the *Codex Regius* and the end of the story of the Volsungs, is also one of the oldest and most difficult of the Eddic poems, so much so that its medieval copyists may have misunderstood parts of it. Some stanzas appear to be out of order, and at times it appears that the wrong speaker has been specified in the text—especially in stanzas 26–30 , which the text gives to the impulsive Hamthir, but which appear to have been originally meant to be Sorli's (and which I have translated as Sorli's words).

Hamthismal

1 BURIED BENEATH THE EARTH
are horrible sorrows,
the desperate things
that make the elves weep.
Early in the morning,
everything that has caused
someone unhappiness
will be remembered anew.

2 It was not recently,
it was not yesterday—
this happened
a long, long time ago.
Few things were so long ago,
that this wasn't twice as long ago,
when Guthrun, daughter of Gjuki,
incited her young sons
to avenge
her daughter Svanhild.

3 "Your sister
named Svanhild—
Jormunrekk had her
trampled by horses!
White and black horses,
gray horses, Gothic horses,
horses he broke to ride
for his errands of war.

4 "You, my sons,
are the last dregs
of my noble family,
you alone live of this line of kings.

5 "I have become as lonely
as an ash tree on the tundra,
I am stripped of my family
like a pine-tree stripped of needles,
deprived of hopes
like a forest that's lost all its leaves
when lightning strikes it
on a hot day."

6 Then Hamthir spoke,
he was a bold young man:
"You had little good to say
about Hogni
when your brothers woke Sigurth
from his last sleep—

you lay in bed
while his killers laughed.

7 "Then your blue and white
striped sheets were reddened
in the flowing blood
of your first husband.
Sigurth was dead,
you stared at his corpse.
Your joy was gone,
and Gunnar caused it.

8 "You had it worse
when you took vengeance
on Attila, and killed
your own sons, Erp and Eitil.
There was no one who'd
swing a battle-loving sword
against your two little boys,
so you had to do it yourself."

9 Sorli spoke then,
he was wise: "I don't want
to exchange barbs
with my mother,
but the two of you
have left something unsaid:
Mother, what are you asking for,
what will make you stop weeping?

10 "You weep for your brothers
and your dear children,
for children you bore
and who died in horror.
But mother, you will weep
for us two as well—
we will mount up on our horses
and die far away from here."

11 They mounted their horses,
they were ready to fight,
those young men
rode over misty mountains,
they rode Hunnish horses,
to avenge their sister's murder.

12 Then Erp spoke,
one fateful time,
he looked proud
sitting on his horse—
"It's no good to show
a coward the way to glory."
To Hamthir and Sorli, it seemed
this bastard sure thought he was brave.

13 They met on the street's
wide cobblestones, and asked him:
"Little dark-haired bastard,
how will you help us in this fight?"

14 Their half-brother
answered as best he could,
he said he would help
his brothers like a foot helps a foot.
But they doubted him:
"How can a foot help a foot?
How can a hand help a hand,
grown from the same flesh?"

15 They drew their swords
from their scabbards
and with their sharp blades
they did an evil spirit's work.
They reduced their numbers
by a third, when two brothers
let their brother
sink dead to the earth.

16 They shook out their cloaks,
they sheathed their swords,
and those noble, well-dressed men
continued on their way.

17 Their road lay ahead,
a dangerous road.
They found Randver
hanging from a beam,
on a wind-chilled gallows
east of the city,
and its timbers creaked
and urged them onward.

18 There was joyful noise
in the beer-happy hall,
when the two young Goths
arrived, and no one heard them,
till a bold, watchful man
blew his horn.

19 He went to tell
Jormunrekk
that strangers in helmets
had been spotted:
"Command us, lord!
Strong men are approaching.
It appears that woman you killed
had powerful relatives."

20 Jormunrekk laughed,
and stroked his beard—
he stood up to fight,
drunk on wine.
He wagged his brown beard
over his white shield,
and cast his golden chalice
from his hand.

21 "I'd feel lucky,"
Jormunrekk said,
"to see Hamthir and Sorli
in my hall.
I'd tie those boys up
with their bow-strings,
let those grandsons of Gjuki
choke on a noose."

22 Then his mother spoke,
standing among the men,
the soft-fingered lady
spoke to her son:
"I think they swore an oath
that they cannot fulfill;
how can those two men alone
fight successfully against
ten hundred Goths
in their own high hall?"

23 There was war in the house,
that ale-house shook,
men lay in pools of blood
that poured from the Goths' chests.

24 Hamthir the bold
then stood and said:
"King Jormunrekk,
you said you'd feel lucky
if my brother and I came
to visit your hall.
Now your arms are cut off,
and your legs are cut off,
and thrown into the fire
before your eyes, in your own hall."

25 Then the king
began to roar
in his suit of armor,
like a bear would roar:
"Men, throw stones at them!

Spears won't pierce them,
blades and iron do nothing
to Jonaker's sons!"

26 Then Sorli turned
to Hamthir:
"You did poorly, brother,
to egg this old windbag on.
A man can still catch death
from an enemy without limbs.

27 "You have courage, Hamthir,
but you have no wisdom.
And a man lacks too much
when he lacks wisdom.

28 "Jormunrekk would lose his head,
if only Erp still lived,
our bold brother,
the one we killed on the road.
Evil spirits encouraged us
to kill our hero-souled brother,
our battle-brave companion,
and go without him in our truest need.

29 "I didn't think
we had the character of wolves,
that we would kill a brother
like faithless wolves in a forest,
greedy for the food
and wealth of others.

30 "But we fought well,
we stand over sword-torn
Gothic corpses and
set a table for the eagles.
We earned honor here,
though we are fated to die today—
a man will not live one day longer
than the Norns have decided."

31 And there Sorli fell
at the threshold,
and Hamthir fell
in the alley.

This is called the Old Tale of Hamthir.

APPENDIX: THE COWBOY *HAVAMAL*

"The Cowboy *Havamal*" is a condensation of the wisdom of the first, most down-to-earth part of *Havamal* (often called the *Gestathattr,* it includes stanzas 1–79, give or take a few) into mostly five-line stanzas of a Western American English dialect. I have not endeavored to render this dialect phonetically in a thoroughly consistent way, but only to present an "eye dialect" of sorts, to suggest the dry tones of the accent behind the words.

While my other translation of *Havamal* in this volume is more complete, the tone of this one seems more authentic to me. The voice is that of my grandfather, sad with wisdom and cynical with experience, which I have always heard when reading this poem in the original.

1 USE YER EYES,
and never walk blind.
There ain't no tellin'
where there's someone waitin'
to put one over on you.

2 Don't be unkind to a wanderer.
You know the type: Waiting,
proud, outside your doorstep.
Give 'im a break,
and let 'im in.

3 Let 'im get close to the fire,
and have a chance
to dry his clothes.
He's been walkin' in the mountains,
and that wears a man down.

4 You know what he's lookin' for:
Some clothes to change into,
a few kind words, not too many,

a chance to tell his story,
a chance to hear what you'll say.

5 You ought to have
a damn sight of learnin',
before you step outside that door.
It's a lot easier to stay at home,
but no one'll listen to you if you stay there.

6 Now, that ain't to say
that you ought to be showy
about your learnin'.
Don't say too much
and you'll say more o' the right things.

7 And don't ever think
that other folks
have nothin' to teach you, either.
You only stand to gain
by keeping yer ears open, too.

8 People's approval ain't nothin' you need.
Half the time it ain't true.
Just be sure you think you're right;
and that you're comfortable in your own skin;
you're all you can count on.

9 And while you should listen
to people's advice,
don't just do whatever they say.
You've got a head on your own shoulders;
use it, boy.

10 That head on your shoulders
is the best thing you'll ever have.
And no amount o' money
can make up for not havin' it.
Keep it in good shape.

11 The worst way to make yourself
into a goddamned fool
is to drink too much.

Stay out o' the liquor,
except you know yer limits.

12 Oh, folks'll say this and that,
how much fun it is to drink and all.
But the more you drink,
the less you know,
and that's a poor exchange.

13 I've been drunk, I'm not sayin' otherwise.
Let me tell you what it's like:
It's as if a bird hovered over your head,
drinking more of your wits
the more you drink.

14 Lord a'mighty, I was drunk,
I was shamefaced drunk.
And I didn't have myself
near as good a time
as if I'd gone home sober.

15 So keep quiet,
keep your head clear,
and don't back off from a fight.
You'll be happier that way—
and you'll die soon enough.

16 You're a goddamned fool
if you think you'll live forever
just because you won't fight.
Say nobody ever kills you—
old age is no peach, either.

17 I'll say another thing about drinkin'—
I swear I'm nearly done:
But just you think how much dumber
a dumb man is after a few drinks:
Who ever heard more awful bullshit?

18 Travel, see the country,
never miss a chance to get outdoors.
You'll only get smarter

by knowin' more people, more places,
more ways to be a man.

19 Accept hospitality, but don't be a jackass.
Folk can only offer so much.
And if you want to talk,
just consider whether what you want to say
matters to anybody else.

20 A belly's a sure sign
that a man's not in control of himself.
Folks'll laugh if you're eatin' too much.
Yer stomach's not yer head—
you can put too much in it.

21 You ever seen a fat cow?
I mean, they're all fat, but only to a point:
They don't eat so much they hurt themselves.
And a cow is just about the dumbest thing
on this damn earth.

22 Nothin' to learn from a fella
who won't but laugh at everybody else.
What he ain't learned
would do him some good:
He's got his own faults.

23 You should lie down to sleep
and not think about tomorrow;
you'll take care of it then.
If you worry at night, you get nothing done,
and you're in worse shape for the day.

24 Not everybody
who laughs with you
is yer friend.
Someone who won't but laugh
hasn't thought about much.

25 Not everybody
who laughs with you
is yer friend.

It's one thing if a fella'll laugh with you,
it's another if you can count on 'im.

26 You're a damn fool
if you think you can just figure out
a way out of any problem.
It's good to think ahead,
but sometimes things go wrong.

27 I wish more damn fools
would just keep their mouths shut.
If they did, we might not realize
just how many goddamned fools
there are in this old world.

28 Ain't ever been a single person
who can keep his mouth shut
when it comes to other people.
But try not to gossip,
even if it makes you look smarter.

29 You will talk yourself into trouble
if you don't think before you speak:
Hold that tongue, and think a little,
or you'll find out that it's a long whip,
and it's gonna hit you from behind.

30 Don't make fun of someone else,
even if he owes you money,
and don't pester people with questions.

31 Sarcastic people sound smart
when they make fun of someone else.
But making fun dudn't make you smart,
and that's time you could be putting
into somethin' more worthwhile.

32 A fella might be nice enough;
there's still something
that'll make 'im want to fight.
Where there's more than one man,
you'll eventually have a fight.

33 You shouldn't sit around
and wait to eat all day.
Go ahead and eat,
unless you're eatin' later with a friend,
otherwise you'll just be useless.

34 Don't concern yerself
with anybody
who won't repay yer friendship in kind.
Better to walk a long way to a friend,
than a short way to some ornery jackass.

35 Don't overstay yer welcome.
Folks like company, but not too much,
and start to resent a guest 'fore long.
So git goin' after a while,
or you'll git on people's nerves.

36 It dudn't matter where you live,
long as you have a roof over you.
Better to call some place home,
even if it ain't much to look at,
than to beg for ever'thing.

37 It dudn't matter where you live,
long as you have a place.
Better to call a place home,
or you'll feel worse and worse,
as you beg for more and more.

38 Keep yer guns close.
I don't care what they say,
there ain't no tellin'
when there'll be call for 'em.
An armed man has a shot.

39 Don't think a generous host
wouldn't gladly take something
in return for yer room and board.
Never seen a man so nice
he wouldn't like a little in return.

40 Don't save so much money
that you don't use any of it.
You'll die, after all,
and it might not go to people you like.
The world ain't aimin' to please you.

41 Give yer friend
a gift that'll matter to 'im:
Weapons, clothes, you know the kind.
This kind of giving, if he gits you back,
will mean he'll have yer back when it counts.

42 Be friendly
to anybody friendly to you,
and repay their gifts.
Repay good with good,
and bad with bad.

43 Be friendly
to anybody friendly to you;
and to his friends, too.
But be careful not to make friends
with your friends' enemies.

44 If you have a good friend,
and really trust 'im,
you should share yer mind with 'im,
exchange gifts with 'im,
visit 'im often.

45 If you have another friend
and don't trust him worth a spit,
but want somethin' from 'im,
speak kindly, but don't be surprised
if you find yerself betrayin' that kindness.

46 Now this fella you don't trust:
That's not to say you shouldn't talk to 'im,
laugh with 'im, even—
hell, who can you trust?
But repay 'im just what he gives you.

47 I was young once, I walked alone,
and I got lost on my way.
It wasn't alone that I found happiness,
but in good company, good friends;
there's no joy in loneliness.

48 Be friendly, be brave if you're challenged,
and don't nurture a grudge for too long.
That's the way to spend yer life—
not on worrying,
not on shirking yer responsibilities.

49 Once I was walkin', I saw two scarecrows,
and that gave me the damnedest funny thought:
They were naked, so I'd give 'em clothes.
They looked a damned sight better in 'em, too;
a naked man just feels ashamed of himself.

50 Think about a pine on the edge o' town—
once a part o' the forest, but the forest is gone,
and now it's surrounded by pasture.
Puts me in mind of a man no one loves—
what's he got to live for?

51 You might think you have a new friend,
but just you wait five days, that'll test 'im.
They say that a bad friendship
burns for only five days,
but on the sixth one it goes out.

52 You may not have much,
so don't give much.
But I've won friends
with just a bowl o' soup
and half a loaf o' bread.

53 A small ocean
has small beaches,
and small brains
have damned little to give.
But the world takes all types.

54 Don't git too goddamned smart, now,
there's a measure for ever'thing.
And don't think it's for nothing
that the stupid people
tend to be the happier ones, too.

55 Don't git too goddamned smart, now,
there's a measure for ever'thing.
You'll know you're gone too far
when you can't find a thing to smile about:
That's what wisdom's like.

56 Don't git too goddamned smart, now,
there's a measure for ever'thing.
And if you think you can learn the future,
you're a damned fool, not a wise man.
You'll be happier not knowing anyway.

57 You won't learn a thing
if you never talk to folks,
and nobody will learn anything from you.
If you keep yer thoughts to yerself,
you'll never turn the lead in yer head to gold.

58 Don't sleep too late,
that's no way to get things done.
If you mean to do business, get goin'—
a lazy wolf never caught a sheep,
a sleeping man never earned a dime.

59 Don't sleep too late,
that's no way to get things done.
If you're still sleepin' at sunrise,
you're losin' the race already—
someone's got more hours than you.

60 You know how to measure wood
and bark for a roof,
and you know the way to tell the time,
and determine the seasons.
You know this stuff, son.

61 Don't go to see folks
with your hair a mess and your clothes dirty.
Put a damned shirt on, and some shoes—
there's no shame in not having the best.
And eat a little first, too.

62 Consider your reputation;
if you go to town, and know nobody,
and nobody has a whit to say about you,
you'll be like an eagle stretching out its beak,
but never catching a fish.

63 Now here's a fact I've learned:
Tell a secret to one good friend,
and that secret might stay with him;
but tell two people your secret,
and everybody will know pretty soon.

64 Don't think you're the goddamned smartest,
or the toughest, or the best at anything,
and don't let folks think you are, either.
Otherwise you'll find out the hard way
that someone is always better.

65 Watch what you say, son—
what you say to other people
is often exactly what you git from 'em.

66 There's bein' too early,
there's bein' too late,
and you can't always predict folks' timing.
But try to be on time;
that wins you more favor.

67 People ain't always sincere
when they say they'll give you somethin';
you don't know it for a fact
till it's in yer hands.
Don't take anybody at just his word.

68 A warm home is good for you,
the sunshine is good for you,
and your health, too, of course,
but don't underestimate how good it is
to live without things to say sorry for.

69 You can never lose ever'thing,
even if yer health looks to give out any minute.
You might still have yer kids, yer family,
yer money, or something else—
or better, a job well done.

70 Better to be alive, no matter what,
than dead—
only the living enjoy anything.
I've seen a rich man's corpse;
it wadn't different than a poor man's.

71 Break yer leg? You can ride a horse still.
Lost a hand? Not yer voice, too, I reckon.
Cain't hear? Bet you can still fight.
There ain't a damn way any shot at life
is worse than empty death.

72 It's good to have a son,
or someone you can call that;
there ain't too many men remembered
'cept those as left family behind.

73 If two fight again' one, two'll probably win.
And again, son, watch yer damn tongue.
And never trust
that what folks keep hidden from you
is for yer own good.

74 The weather can change a lot in five days,
it can change even more in a month,
and you're a fool if you think you can predict it.
Never trust to anything
that's not in yer own power.

75 I've said you should listen,
but don't listen to goddamned idiots.
And remember: You might be poor,
someone else might be rich,
and neither o' you has the other to blame.

76 Cows die, friends and family die,
you will die just the same way.
But if you have a good reputation,
that might survive you.

77 Cows die, friends and family die,
you will die just the same way.
The only thing that won't die
is what folks say about you
when you're dead.

78 I saw a rich man's sons,
they had a good many head o' cattle.
Now they're beggars in the street.
Wealth's nothin' to count on;
it'll leave you as soon as it finds you.

79 Now, a good thing may happen
to a pretty stupid man,
but that dudn't make him any better.
He'll be just as arrogant,
and not any smarter.

(81) Don't sing the praises
of anything that ain't over.
Not the day's before the night,
not the work's before its end,
not the man's before his death.

GLOSSARY OF NAMES

This glossary is not intended to include every one of the thousands of names mentioned in the Poetic Edda, but only those that belong to characters and places that the reader might need defined in order to understand the text more fully. Names that occur in lists, such as those from the list of dwarves in *Voluspa*, the children and grandchildren of Rig/Heimdall in *Rigsthula*, and most of the verses of *Vafthruthnismal*, *Grimnismal*, *Alvissmal*, and *Voluspa en skamma*, are excluded since they have little bearing on the overall understanding of the text. Names of characters (especially human characters) who are mentioned only in passing are typically also excluded, such as the names mentioned by Sigerdrifa in her retelling of her past in *Sigrdrifumal*.

Much of the material used to provide further context in the entries below is drawn from Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda; see the English translation by Anthony Faulkes under "Further Reading" in the Introduction.

The alphabetization here is based on American rather than Scandinavian conventions, so Æ is treated as A+E, Þ is treated as TH, Ð is treated as D, Ø is treated as O, and the length of vowels is ignored.

Aegir, also known as *Gymir* (2); the host of the gods' feasts. He is a *giant*.

Aesir (plural), a family of gods including *Odin* and *Thor*.

Afi, father with Amma of the middle class of humans. His name literally means "grandfather."

Agnar (1), son of *Hrauthung*, fostered by *Frigg* and later betrayed by his brother *Geirroth*.

Agnar (2), son of *Geirroth*, who brings *Odin* (in the disguise of *Shadowed-Face*) a drink in *Grimnismal*, for which he is rewarded by being made king when his father dies.

Ai, father (by *Edda*) of the servant class of humans. His name literally means "great-grandfather" or "ancestor."

Alf (1), a son of *Hrothmar*, and killer of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Alf (2), a son of *Hunding*.

Alf (3), second husband of *Hjordis*, after the death of *Sigmund*.

Alfheim, land of the *elves*, presided over by *Frey*.

Algron, an island mentioned by *Odin* in *Vafthruthnismal*.

All-Wise, a *dwarf* who wishes to marry the daughter of *Thor*.

Alsvith, one of the pair of horses that draw the sun across the sky.

Amma, mother with Afi of the middle class of humans. Her name literally means "grandmother."

Andhrimnir, the cook in *Valhalla*.

Andvaranaut, a ring formerly belonging to the *dwarf* known as *Andvari*. It is cursed to cause the death of anyone who possesses it.

Andvari, a *dwarf* who lives in the form of a fish. *Loki* takes his ring *Andvaranaut*, which Andvari places a curse on.

Angerbotha, a *giant* woman. Mother with *Loki* of *Fenrir*, *Hel*, and the *Midgard-serpent*.

Arvak, one of the pair of horses that draw the sun across the sky.

Asgard, the home of the *Aesir* gods.

Ask, "ash tree," the name of the first human man.

Atli, a follower of *Hjorvarth* and later of his son, *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Attila, king of Hunland, the son of *Buthli* and brother of *Brynhild* and *Oddrun*. Second husband of *Guthrun*. In some poems (including *Guthrunarkvitha I*, *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, and *Oddrunargratr*), it appears that it was Attila who forced his sister Brynhild to marry.

Aurnir, a *giant*.

Balder, a son of *Odin*, accidentally slain by his blind brother *Hoth* at the instigation of *Loki* (a story related in detail in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, translated by Faulkes; see suggestions under "Further Reading" in the Introduction).

Barri, a grove where *Gerth* will meet *Frey* for their wedding.

Battle-Stirrer, one of the many names of *Odin* in disguise, and the name he uses in *Reginsmal*.

Bestla, mother of *Odin*.

Beyla, a servant of *Frey*, wife of *Byggvir*.

Bifrost, the rainbow, the bridge between *Midgard* and *Asgard*, guarded by *Heimdall*. It appears that Asgard is over *Midgard*, and also located somewhat to the west.

Bikki, an advisor to *Jormunrekk*. He tells Jormunrekk that *Svanhild* has had an affair with *Randver*, which leads to Svanhild's death.

Billing's daughter, apparently a *giant* woman. *Odin* fails to seduce her, as he tells in *Havamal*.

Blind the Crafty, a follower of *Hunding*'s.

Bolthorn, a *giant*, and maternal grandfather of *Odin*. In *Havamal*, Odin says that he learned magic from him.

Borghild, first wife of *Sigmund*, mother of *Helgi*. She kills *Sinfjotli*.

Borgny, daughter of *Heithrek*, who struggles to give birth to twins and is aided by *Oddrun*.

Bothvild, daughter of *Nithuth*, raped by *Volund*.

Bragi (1), a god of poetry. He is the husband of *Ithunn*.

Bragi (2), a son of *Hogni* (1).

Bralund, apparently a land associated with the *Volsungs*.

Breithablik, hall of *Balder*.

Brimir, a *giant* who owns the beer-hall *Okolnir*. In *Sigrdrifumal*, the god *Odin* is said to hold "the sword of Brimir," but this is never explained.

Brisingamen, necklace of *Freyja*.

Brynhild, a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Buthli*, sister of *Attila*. *Sigurth* courts her in the disguise of *Gunnar*, and so she is married to *Gunnar*, but eventually she discovers the truth and causes the death of *Sigurth*. It is unclear whether she is or is not the same person as *Sigerdrifa*.

Bur, father of *Odin*.

Buthli, father of *Attila*, *Oddrun*, and *Brynhild* (the latter is very frequently referenced as "the daughter of Buthli").

Byggvir, a servant of *Frey*, and husband of *Beyla*.

Dag, a son of *Hogni* (1).

Dain, a *dwarf*.

Denmark, roughly coterminous with the modern country, but in the medieval period it included much of what is now southern *Sweden*.

Dvalin, a *dwarf*.

Dwarf, a type of short humanlike creature referenced throughout the Poetic Edda. Dwarves are master craftsmen (apparently all male) who are descended from the maggots that grew in the rotting flesh of *Ymir*. In at least some stories (e.g. *Alvissmal*), they are turned to stone by sunlight. Many of them are represented as having shape-changing abilities (for instance, *Andvari* lives as a fish and *Otter* as an otter), and to have the ability to enter solid stone in order to hide themselves.

Earth, personified as a goddess, referenced chiefly as the mother of *Thor*.

Edda, mother with Ai of the servant class of humans. Her name literally means "great-grandmother" (whether this is the origin of the title *Edda* is unknown).

Eggther, a *giant*, described as a herdsman, who plays a harp at *Ragnarok*.

Egil (1), a man (or *giant*?) who tends *Thor*'s goats while *Thor* and *Tyr* retrieve the cauldron in *Hymiskvitha*. Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda fills in details, such as that his children later become *Thor*'s slaves because one of them accidentally cripples one of the goats.

Egil (2), a brother of *Volund* and a famous archer.

Einherjar, *Odin*'s chosen, the dead warriors who inhabit *Valhalla*.

Eitil, son of *Guthrun* and *Attila*.

Eldhrimnir, the cooking cauldron in *Valhalla*.

Eldir, a servant of *Aegir*.

Elf, a supernatural creature associated with the gods, but apparently of a lower rank than the *Aesir* or *Vanir*. *Elves* are never described in terms that indicate what, if any, special appearance or characteristics they may have. They may be the same creatures as *dwarves*.

Elivagar, unknown location.

Embla, "elm tree," the name of the first human woman.

Erp (1), son of *Guthrun* and *Attila*.

Erp (2), son of *Jonaker* and a concubine, according to the very early *Hamthismal* (in the later *Guthrunarhvot*, he is the son of *Jonaker* and *Guthrun*), and therefore half-brother (or brother) of *Hamthir* and *Sorli*.

Eyjolf, a son of *Hunding*.

Eylimi (1), father of *Svava*.

Eylimi (2), father of *Hjordis* (the mother of *Sigurth*) and *Gripir*.

Fafnir, the dragon slain by *Sigurth* in *Fafnismal*. *Fafnir* was apparently born a *dwarf*; he is the brother of *Regin* and *Otter*, and seems to become a dragon only after he kills their father *Hreithmar*.

Father, father (with *Mother*) of the noble class of humans.

Fenja, a *giant* woman, enslaved with her sister *Menja* to work on the millstone *Grotti*.

Fenrir, a monstrous wolf imprisoned till *Ragnarok*, and son of *Loki*. At *Ragnarok* he will kill *Odin*, but he will be killed in turn by *Vithar*.

Fensalir, the hall of the goddess *Frigg*.

Fimafeng, a servant of *Aegir*, killed by *Loki* in *Lokasenna*.

Fimbulveter, the terrible winter that will precede *Ragnarok*.

Finni, father of *Volund*; king of an unspecified kingdom.

Fjalar (1), a rooster.

Fjalar (2), the host of a feast mentioned in *Havamal*.

Fjolvar, unidentified associate of *Odin*.

Fjorsungs, the family that includes *Granmar* and his sons.

Folkvang, home of *Freyja*.

Forseti, a little-known god, apparently associated with justice.

Freki, one of *Odin*'s wolves.

Frey, a god of the *Vanir* family, son of *Njorth*, and brother of *Freyja*, associated with fertility and agriculture.

Freyja, a goddess of the *Vanir* family, daughter of *Njorth*, sister of *Frey*, associated with love and fertility. May have been understood by some poets as the same goddess as *Frigg*.

Frigg, a goddess. The wife of *Odin*, and the mother of *Balder*. May have been understood by some poets as the same goddess as *Freyja*.

Frithleif, son of *Skjold*, father of *Frothi*.

Frothi, a king of *Denmark*. He forced *Fenja* and *Menja* to work the millstone *Grotti* for his benefit. His reign was noted for its peacefulness.

Fulla, servant of *Frigg*.

Gefjun, a goddess.

Geirroth, son of *Hrauthung*, who is fostered by *Odin* but later tortures him (in the disguise of *Shadowed-Face*).

Geirskogul, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

Geitir, servant of *Gripir*.

Geri, one of *Odin*'s wolves.

Gerth, a *giant* woman courted by *Frey* through *Skirnir* in *For Skirnis*.

Giant, traditional English translation of Old Norse *jotunn* and related words. The term does not appear to imply a creature that is necessarily larger than the gods are, and the *giants* do not usually look different from the gods (or, indeed, humans). *Giant* women are often attractive and even marry gods (see e.g., *Gerth* and *Skathi*). However, there are also *giants* that are ugly or have unusual numbers of heads (e.g. *Tyr*'s grandmother in *Hymiskvitha*), and some are turned to stone in daylight (e.g. *Hrimgerth* in *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*).

Gimle, the home of those who survive after *Ragnarok*.

Ginnungagap, "yawning gap," the nothingness that preceded creation.

Gjallarhorn, the horn blown by *Heimdall* to announce *Ragnarok*.

Gjuki, king of a people sometimes identified in the text as the *Goths*. Gjuki is the husband of *Grimhild*, and father of *Gunnar*, *Hogni*, *Guthrun*, and *Gotthorm*.

Gladsheim, a land in *Asgard* said to be the location of *Valhalla*.

Glaum, the horse of *Attila*.

Glaumvor, wife of *Gunnar*.

Glitnir, home of *Forseti*.

Gnitaheith, the place where the dragon *Fafnir* dwells with his treasure, until he is killed by *Sigurth*.

Gondul, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

Good Advisor, name used by *Odin* in *Vafthruthnismal*.

Goth, a Germanic people of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Numerous human characters in the Poetic Edda are referred to as *Goths*, including sometimes people on both sides of a conflict (e.g. in *Hamthismal*).

Gotthorm, youngest brother of *Guthrun*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. He is given a magical potion to make him act ferociously and kill *Sigurth*. He is killed by *Sigurth* in turn. Curiously, in *Voluspa en skamma*, *Gotthorm* is said to be only a half-brother to *Gunnar* and *Hogni*, perhaps in an attempt to separate his foul deed of murdering *Sigurth* from the otherwise heroic reputation of his brothers.

Gotthorm the Good, unknown figure mentioned in *Grottasongr*.

Gram, the sword of *Sigurth*, forged by *Regin*.

Grani, the horse of *Sigurth*.

Granmar, father of *Hothbrodd*.

Graybeard, pseudonym assumed by *Odin* in *Harbarthsljoth*.

Grimhild, wife of *Gjuki* and mother of *Gunnar*, *Hogni*, *Guthrun*, and *Gotthorm*. She is a witch, and she uses magic to disguise *Sigurth* as Gunnar when he woos *Brynhild*, to give Gotthorm the blind fury he needs to kill Sigurth, and to make Guthrun forget Sigurth after his death (according to *Guthrunarkvitha II*).

Gripir, son of *Eylimi*, uncle of *Sigurth*, and brother of *Hjordis*. He has prophetic powers, which he uses to foresee *Sigurth*'s future in *Gripisspa*.

Grotti, a magical millstone owned by the king *Frothi*. It will grind out anything that is desired, including abstract concepts such as peace.

Gullveig, a vaguely described sorceress (goddess? *giant*?) who precipitates the first war.

Gunn, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

Gunnar, son of *Gjuki* and *Grimhild*, oldest brother of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. He marries *Brynhild* after *Sigurth* courts her in the disguise of *Gunnar*, and when *Brynhild* later finds out about this deception, *Gunnar* is incited by Brynhild to kill *Sigurth*. *Gunnar* is killed in a pit full of venomous snakes by *Attila*, his sister *Guthrun*'s second husband.

Gunnloth, otherwise unknown *giant* woman mentioned in *Havamal*.

Guthmund, brother of *Hothbrodd*, insulted by *Sinfjotli*.

Guthrun, sister of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Hogni*. She marries first *Sigurth*, then *Attila*, then *Jonaker*. She avenges the deaths of her brothers on *Attila* by cooking their children and feeding them to him. Later she incites her sons *Hamthir* and *Sorli* to avenge her daughter *Svanhild* on *Jormunrekk*.

Gymir (1), father of *Gerth*.

Gymir (2), another name for *Aegir*.

Habrok, a hawk.

Hagal, foster-father of *Helgi Sigmundsson*, who disguises himself as *Hamal* while spying on *Hunding* and again when he first meets *Sigrun* in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*.

Halfdan, a king killed by *Frothi*.

Hamal, foster-brother of *Helgi Sigmundsson*.

Hamthir, son of *Guthrun* and *Jonaker*. Brother of *Sorli* and half-brother of *Erp* (2).

Hamund, a son of *Sigmund*.

Hangjaw, the man (*Odin* in disguise) who gives *Grotti* to *Frothi*.

Hati (1), a wolf that follows the sun, and will swallow it at *Ragnarok*.

Hati (2), a *giant*, father of *Hrimgerth*.

Havarth, a son of *Hunding*.

Heimdall, watchman of the gods, possibly a member of the *Vanir*. Under the name *Rig*, he also slept with human couples of various classes to father his "greater and lesser children" (i.e. humans of higher and lower social classes).

Heith, a name given to *Gullveig* in *Voluspa*. In *Voluspa en skamma* a *Heith* (possibly the same woman) is the daughter of a *giant* named *Hrimnir*.

Heithrek, a king, father of *Borgny*.

Hel, daughter of *Loki*, who appears to be half-corpse, half-living, and who rules the underworld realm, which is also called *Hel*, an abode of the dead. *Hel* is not necessarily a place of judgment for the evil dead, as in Christian tradition, but rather a repository for souls of those who have not died in battle (the latter go to *Valhalla*).

Helgi Hjorvarthsson, a son of *Hjorvarth*, hero of the poem *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar*.

Helgi Sigmundsson, a son of *Sigmund* (1), hero of the poems *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I* and *II*. He is named for *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Heming, a son of *Hunding*.

Herkja, a concubine of *Attila*.

Hervor, a *Valkyrie*, wife of *Volund*.

Hethin, son of *Hjorvarth*, half-brother to *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*. He swears an oath to marry Helgi's fiancée *Svava*, and later swears to her that he will avenge Helgi's death.

Hild, the name of a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Hogni* (1), who caused her father to fight her lover. *Helgi Sigmundsson* compares *Sigrun* to her in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II* (st. 29).

Hildolf, mentioned by *Odin* as owner of his ferry in *Harbarthsljoth*.

Himinbjorg, hall of *Heimdall*.

Hindarfjall, a mountain where the hall of *Sigerdrifa* is located.

Hjordis, second wife of *Sigmund*, mother of *Sigurth*. She remarries with *Alf*.

Hjorleif, a captain or lieutenant under *Helgi*.

Hjorvarth (1), husband of *Sigerlinn* and father of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Hjorvarth (2), a son of *Hunding*.

Hlathguth, a *Valkyrie*, said to be from *Mirkwood*, married to *Slagfinn*.

Hlebarth, a *giant* deceived and robbed by *Odin*.

Hlesey, an island.

Hlithskjalf, the throne of *Odin*.

Hlothver, father of the *Valkyries Hlathguth* and *Hervor*.

Hlymdalir, apparently the ancestral home of *Brynhild*.

Hogni (1), father of the *Valkyrie Sigrun*.

Hogni (2), brother of *Gotthorm*, *Gunnar*, and *Guthrun*. Hogni is represented as the most reasonable of his brothers, and as a fantastically skilled warrior.

Honir, a vaguely described god who helps *Odin* and *Loth* ensoul humans and who survives *Ragnarok*.

Hoth, a blind son of *Odin* who accidentally kills his brother *Balder* with a mistletoe bough when he is deceived by *Loki* into throwing it (a story related in detail in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, translated by Faulkes).

Hothbrodd, *Helgi*'s rival for the hand of *Sigrun*.

Hrauthung, father of *Geirroth* and *Agnar* (1).

Hrimgerth, a *giant* woman, daughter of *Hati*. She exchanges insults with *Atli* and *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Hrimgrimnir, a *troll*.

Hrothmar, killer of King *Svafnir*. He is killed by *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Hrungnir, a *giant* killed by *Thor*.

Hrym, a *giant*.

Hun, an Asian people of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, whose raids in Europe reached their peak in the fifth century AD and brought them into both conflicts and alliances with the Germanic *Goths*. Numerous human characters in the Poetic Edda are referred to as *Huns* (or as King of the *Huns*), especially *Attila* (who is distantly based on the historical Attila the Hun) and *Sigurth*.

Hunding, a king who is killed by *Helgi Sigmundsson*. Some of *Hunding*'s sons kill *Sigmund*, a killing that is avenged by *Sigurth*.

Hymir, a *giant*, father of *Tyr*. His daughters are mentioned in *Lokasenna*.

Hyndla, a witch.

Idi, a *giant*.

Ithavoll, a valley, apparently on *Asgard*.

Ithunn, one of the *Aesir*, who keeps golden apples that the gods eat to remain young. She is married to *Bragi*.

Jalangerheith, unknown location.

Jonaker, a king, third husband of *Guthrun*.

Jormunrekk, a king who is promised the hand of *Svanhild* in marriage. He has her trampled to death by horses when he learns that his son *Randver* has had an affair with her while transporting her to the wedding.

Jotunheim, "giant-home," the realm of the *giants*. It is said to be east of *Asgard*, and *Thor* is frequently said to be "out east" or "coming back from the east," implying he has been in Jotunheim.

Kjar, father of *Olrun*.

Knefroth, messenger of *Attila*.

Knui, unknown figure mentioned in *Grottasongr*.

Kostbera, wife of *Hogni*.

Laufey, mother (not father) of *Loki*.

Loddfafnir, an unknown character addressed during part of *Havamal*. The meaning of the name has not been deciphered.

Loki, a complicated trickster figure, father of *Fenrir* and *Hel* but occasionally friendly to the *Aesir*. After causing the death of *Balder* he is imprisoned till *Ragnarok* (with venom dripping upon him from a serpent that hangs above him), when he will escape and side with the *giants*.

Loth, a vaguely described god who helps *Odin* and *Honir* ensoul humans.

Magni, a son of *Thor*. *Thor* is often identified as "the father of Magni."

Meili, a brother of *Thor*, not otherwise known.

Memory, one of *Odin*'s ravens (Old Norse *Muninn*).

Menja, a *giant* woman, enslaved with her sister *Fenja* to work on the millstone *Grotti*.

Midgard, literally the "middle-enclosure," the world in which humans live.

Midgard-serpent, a gigantic dragon or snake said to dwell in the ocean surrounding the land of *Midgard*. The serpent is *Loki*'s son by *Angerbotha*, and brother to *Fenrir* and *Hel*.

Mimir, a famously wise *giant* who owns *Mimir's well*. A drink from his well bestows wisdom, but Odin had to leave one of his eyes in the well in exchange for a drink. Later *Mimir* is beheaded, but *Odin* pickles his head and continues to consult him for his wisdom.

Mirkwood, anglicized name of Old Norse *Myrkvithr*, a famous forest mentioned in several poems; associated vaguely with "the south."

Miskorblindi, an unknown figure, perhaps a *giant*.

Mjollnir, the magical hammer of *Thor*.

Mother, the mother, with *Father*, of the noble class of humans.

Mysing, a "sea-king" summoned by *Fenja* and *Menja* to kill *Frothi* when they turn the magical millstone *Grotti* to their own purposes.

Naglfar, "(finger)nail-vessel," a ship made of the untrimmed nails of corpses, sailed by *Loki* and the *giants* at *Ragnarok*.

Nari, a son of *Loki* who is killed by the *Aesir* and whose intestines are then used to tie up *Loki*.

Narvi, a son of *Loki* who is turned into a wolf after *Loki* insults the gods in *Lokasenna*.

Nithhogg, a huge dragon that constantly chews at the roots of *Yggdrasil*. It survives *Ragnarok*.

Nithuth, a king in Sweden who imprisons *Volund*.

Njari, the kingdom of *Nithuth*, apparently a region of Sweden.

Njorth, a god of the *Vanir* family, father of *Freyja* and *Frey*.

Noatun, hall of *Njorth*, frequently mentioned in association with him.

Norns, the three sisters who determine the fate of gods and humans. They are *Skuld*, *Urth*, and *Verthandi*.

Oddrun, sister of *Attila* and *Brynhild*. She and *Gunnar* are lovers after the death of *Brynhild*, but *Attila* refuses to let his sister marry *Gunnar*. She is credited with knowing spells that ease childbirth.

Odin, god of poetry and war. He is often portrayed as a shrewd figure pursuing his own selfish interests, including the dispatching of human warriors so that they may serve in his army in *Valhalla*. He is very frequently seen in disguise and takes many names, such as *Good Advisor*, *Graybeard*, and *Shadowed-Face*.

Olrun, a *Valkyrie*, said to be from *Mirkwood* and to be a sorceress. Married to *Egil* (2).

Oskopnir, an island where the final battle of *Ragnarok* will be fought.

Othrerir, the name of the horn that contains a magical mead, which imparts the ability to compose poetry upon whoever drinks it. The mead itself is also called *Othrerir*.

Ottar, a young nobleman who learns of his ancestry from *Hyndla* in *Voluspa en skamma*.

Otter, a *dwarf* (brother of *Fafnir* and *Regin*) who lives most of his life in the form of an otter. He is killed by *Loki*, which precipitates the action of the bulk of the heroic poems.

Ragnarok, the foretold end of the world, when most gods and humans will be wiped out.

Ran, goddess of shipwrecks.

Randver, son of *Jormunrekk*, who has an affair with *Svanhild* while transporting her to her marriage with his father.

Regin, a dwarven smith (brother of *Fafnir* and *Otter*) who raises *Sigurth*, forges the sword *Gram* for him, and incites *Sigurth* to kill his brother, the dragon *Fafnir*.

Riddle-Weaver, Old Norse *Vafthruthnir*, a *giant* who competes with *Odin* to determine who knows more mythological lore.

Rig, alternative name for *Heimdall*.

Rind, mother, with *Odin*, of *Vali*.

Rune, a letter of the runic alphabet that was used for writing the Old Norse language before the adoption of the Roman alphabet. (The Roman alphabet is the contemporary alphabet used to write English.) Runes were apparently regarded as bestowing special power on those who knew how to carve them, as evidenced by their mentions in *Havamal* and *Sigrdrifumal*.

Saehrimnir, the boar whose flesh is eaten in *Valhalla*.

Saevarstoth, a small island where *Volund* is imprisoned.

Saga, a little-known goddess(?), associated with the sea.

Samsey, an island.

Saxi, a king mentioned in *Guthrunarkvitha III*, who knows how to bless a kettle for the trial by ordeal.

Sefafjoll, home of *Sigrun*.

Shadowed-Face, the name taken by *Odin* in disguise in *Grimnismal*.

Sif, wife of *Thor*. She is said to have hair made of gold.

Sigerdrifa, a *Valkyrie* who is imprisoned by *Odin* inside a ring of fire for her refusal to obey his orders; she cannot be freed till a man who knows no fear rides through the flames. *Sigurth* frees her, and she gives him advice in *Sigrdrifumal*. It is unclear if she is the same *Valkyrie* as *Brynhild*; she is treated as the same individual in some medieval sources but not in others.

Sigerlinn, wife of *Hjorvarth*, mother of *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Siggeir, foster-father of *Sinfjotli*.

Sigmund (1), father of *Sigurth* and *Sinfjotli*.

Sigmund (2), son of *Sigurth* and *Guthrun*, and thus grandson of *Sigmund* (1).

Sigrun, a *Valkyrie*, daughter of *Hogni*, and lover of *Helgi Sigmundsson*, who fights for her against *Hothbrodd*.

Sigurth, son of *Sigmund* (1), the slayer of the dragon *Fafnir*. First husband of *Guthrun*. He acquires a famous hoard of treasure after killing *Fafnir*.

Sigyn, the wife of *Loki*, who sits beside him in his prison.

Sindri, probably a *dwarf*, who owns a hall made of gold.

Sinfjotli, son of *Sigmund* (1), half-brother to *Sigurth* and *Helgi Sigmundsson*. According to *Volsunga saga*, he is the son of *Sigmund* and his sister *Signy*, and *Sinfjotli* killed his own half-brothers by *Signy* and her first husband, *Siggeir* (these events are alluded to in *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana I*, st. 36 and 41).

Skathi, goddess of skis and snowshoes, born a *giant*, daughter of *Thjassi*, and wife of *Njorth*.

Skirnir, messenger of *Frey*, sent to woo the *giant* woman *Gerth* for *Frey* in *For Skirnis*.

Skjold, ancestor of the *Skjoldungs*.

Skjoldungs, a well-known dynasty of Scandinavian kings.

Skogul, the name of a *Valkyrie*.

Skol, a wolf who follows the moon, and who will swallow it at *Ragnarok*.

Skuld (1), "ought," the name of one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

Skuld (2), the name of a *Valkyrie*.

Slagfinn, a brother of *Volund*.

Sleipnir, the eight-legged horse of *Odin*.

Slith, a river associated with the *giants*.

Sokkvabekk, an (apparently) underwater hall used by *Odin* and *Saga*.

Sorli, son of *Guthrun* and *Jonaker*, brother of *Hamthir*, and half-brother of *Erp* (2).

Spellcaster, a king of *Sweden* (*Odin* in disguise) who sells *Frothi* the slaves *Fenja* and *Menja*. *Grimnismal* gives "Spellcaster" (*Fjolnir*) as one of Odin's names, and Odin (disguised as *Battle-Stirrer*) mentions it again as one of his names in *Reginsmal*.

Starkath, a son of *Granmar*.

Surt, a *giant* who carries a flaming sword.

Suttung, a *giant*.

Svafnir, father of *Sigerlinn*; he is killed by *Hrothmar*.

Svanhild, daughter of *Guthrun* and *Sigurth*. She is killed by *Jormunrekk*. According to *Volsunga saga*, this is because *Randver* betrays his trust and has a tryst with her while transporting her to her marriage with *Jormunrekk*.

Svarang, a *giant*.

Svava, a *Valkyrie* who guards and eventually becomes engaged to *Helgi Hjorvarthsson*.

Sweden, roughly coterminous with the modern country, but much of the southern part of what is now Sweden belonged to *Denmark* till early modern times.

Thakkrath, a servant of *Nithuth*.

Thjassi, a proverbially strong *giant*, father of *Skathi*. It is said that *Thor* killed him and threw his eyes into the sky, where they became stars.

Thjothrek, a king who visits *Attila*. *Guthrun* tells him her tragic story in *Guthrunarkvitha II*, and in *Guthrunarkvitha III* he is falsely accused of having an affair with *Guthrun*.

Thor, the god of thunder and protector of humankind. He is the son of *Odin* and the *Earth*. His weapon is the hammer *Mjollnir*.

Thought, one of *Odin*'s ravens (Old Norse *Huginn*).

Thruthheim, home of *Thor*.

Thrym, a *giant* who steals *Mjollnir*.

Thrymheim, a hall of *giants*.

Troll, possibly the same type of creature as a *giant*, though the term *troll* seems to be always negative and associated with an ugly semi-human monster (whereas *giants* may be attractive).

Tyr, one of the *Aesir*. He is missing one hand, which he lost to the wolf *Fenrir* when the gods promised Fenrir that a magical chain would not bind him permanently. The wolf demanded that one of the gods place his hand in the wolf's mouth as a pledge that this was not done in deceit. Only *Tyr* stepped forward to offer his hand, and the wolf bit it off. The story is told more fully in the Prose Edda (see Faulkes under "Further Reading" in the Introduction).

Ulfdalir, valley region where *Volund* makes his home.

Ulfsja, lake in *Ulfdalir*.

Ull, a little-known god. *Guthrun* claims that *Attila* swore an oath on *Ull*'s ring in *Atlakvitha*.

Unn, a daughter of *Aegir*. In *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana II*, we read that *Helgi Sigmundsson* and *Dag* swear oaths to one another on her stone.

Urth, one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

Utgartha-Loki, a *giant* of truly immense size. In Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda it is related that *Thor* once slept in *Utgartha-Loki*'s glove, which was so gigantic that he mistook it for a house. *Thor* is often mocked for this.

Valaskjalf, a hall of *Odin*.

Valhalla, "hall of the slain," where the *Valkyries* bring slain warriors to live with *Odin* till *Ragnarok*.

Vali, son of *Odin* and *Rind*, who avenges the death of *Balder* on *Hoth* while he is only one night old.

Valkyries, "choosers of the slain," women who fly over battlefields and conduct the spirits of the best slain warriors to *Valhalla*. A *Valkyrie* is not a separate kind of being from humans, but appears instead to be an occupation that mortal women (such as *Sigrun*) can assume.

Vanaheim, a realm inhabited by the *Vanir* gods.

Vanir (plural), a family of gods associated with agriculture and fertility (*Frey* and his sister *Freyja*) and the sea (their father *Njorth*). *Njorth* and his children live with the *Aesir* in *Asgard*; it is implied that there are other Vanir as well who live in *Vanaheim*.

Var, goddess of wedding vows.

Ve, a brother of *Odin*.

Verthandi, "happening," the name of one of the *Norns*, the three sisters who determine fate.

Vilir, a brother of *Odin*.

Vilmund, lover of *Borgny*, mentioned (in *Oddrunargratr* only) as the killer of *Hogni* (2).

Vithar, a son of *Odin* who will slay *Fenrir* at *Ragnarok* after *Fenrir* kills *Odin*.

Volsung, the eponymous ancestor of the *Volsungs*, father of *Sigmund*.

Volsungs, the family that includes *Sigurth* and *Helgi* and their father *Sigmund*. The family is named for *Sigmund*'s father, *Volsung*.

Volund, identified as an *elf*, a smith of great talent.

Ydalir, home of *Ull*.

Yggdrasil, the ash tree central to the nine worlds of Norse cosmology, where *Odin* hanged himself on a sort of vision-quest in which he learned the runic alphabet.

Ylfings, an alternative name for the *Volsungs*.

Ymir, the first *giant*, and the first living thing. *Odin* and his brothers made the earth from his corpse.

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—Dick Ringler, Professor Emeritus of English and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

Jackson Crawford earned his Ph.D. in Scandinavian Studies from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Georgia. He has taught Norse mythology, the Old Norse language, and the history of the Scandinavian languages at UCLA. His poems in English and Norwegian have appeared in several journals.

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